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ASTON MARTIN
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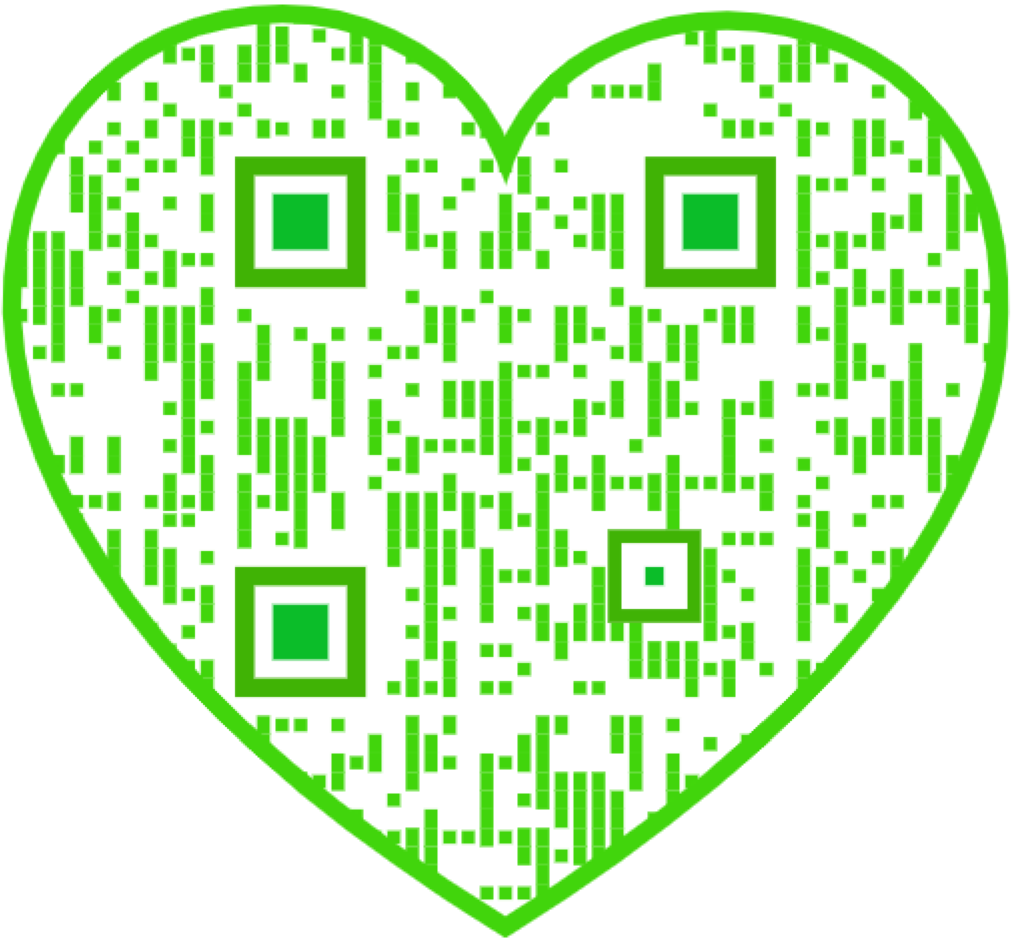
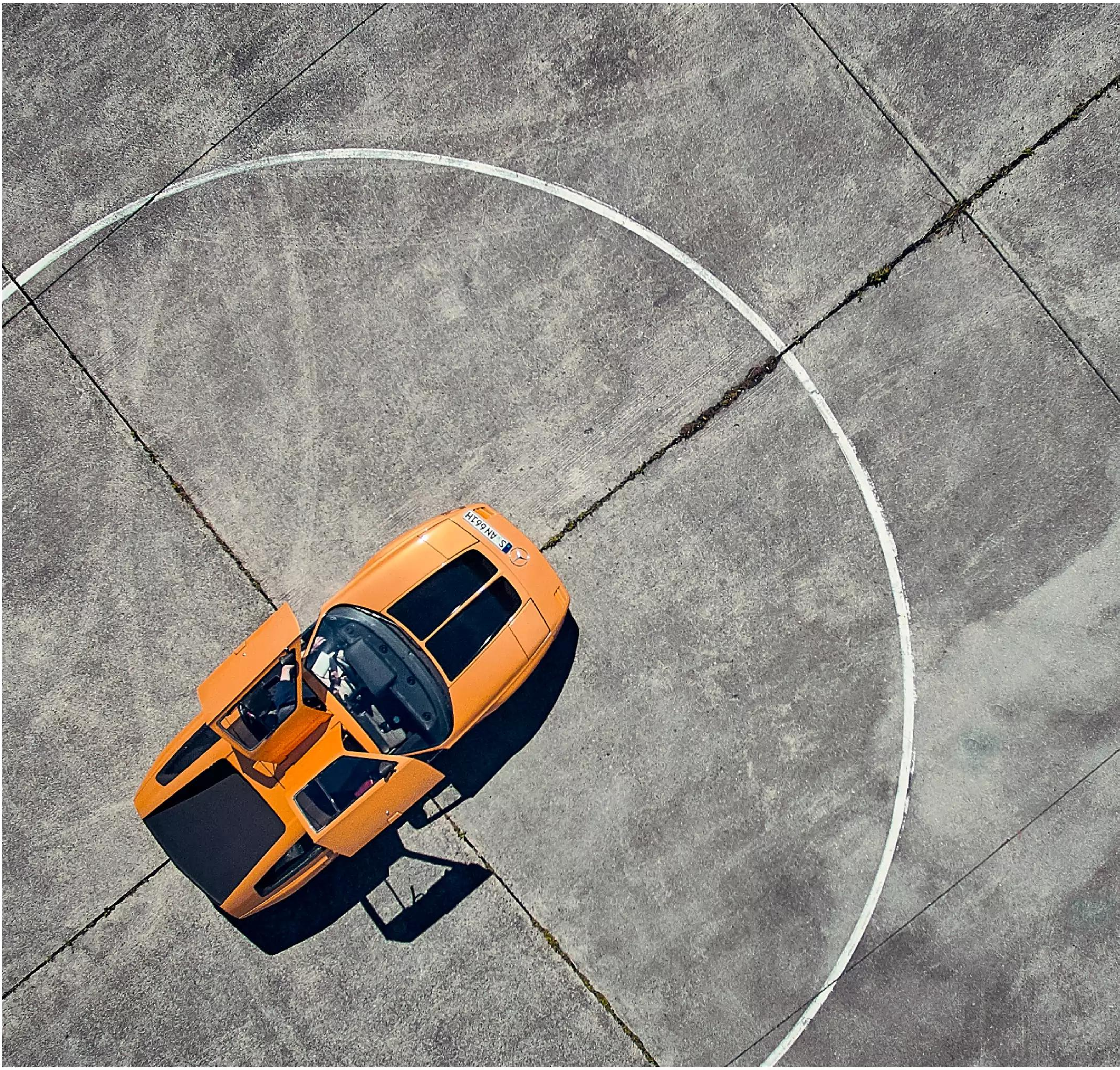
+ HOT HATCHES FROM LANCIA, SUBARU, VW AND MORE



LEGENDS SPECIAL #1 | EXCLUSIVE TO READLY



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Turbo 2

HF

Golf
MOTOR SPORT

iso-delta

OLD MASTERS

Honda's current Civic Type R is great. But if it's a hot hatch icon you're after, the likes of Lancia's Delta Integrale and the Renault 5 Turbo have to be on your watch list… Here's how to put a legend in your lock-up

Photography John Wycherley

RENAULT 5 TURBO 2

J'AI UNE IDÉE…

Inspired by the mid-engined Lancia Stratos, Renault made its 5 into a supercar

One winter Sunday night in 1997 I was taught a humbling lesson – that turbocharging in a lightweight Renault gets results.

On a riot of an A-road I knew like the back of my hand, a pair of headlights caught up with me going through a village. As the speed limit lifted, I decided to show this upstart all the straight-line bombast my 205 XS could muster, clogging it in third and letting the Peugeot's sawn-off gearing and insignificant mass do the rest.

Except that rather than freefall in my mirrors, the headlights came alongside before overtaking with a clean precision my poor brain found difficult to comprehend. Those lights belonged to a Renault 5 GT Turbo – and clearly its pilot was having fun. For the next 10 miles or so they ripped on ahead, only to pull over, let me pass, and then overtake me with impunity all over again, like a Spitfire toying with a lost and damaged Dornier.

The front-engined Renault 5 GT Turbo made 115bhp initially, 120bhp later, from an unlikely combination of ancient pushrod four and a Garrett T3 turbo. It was also light; at 850kg, it was lighter even than a 205. I'd never encountered anything like it, but it could have been worse. Those lights could have belonged to a 5 Turbo, the mid-engined miscreant Renault put out in the giddy early years of its infatuation with forced induction.

The 5 Turbo arrived in 1980, a homologation oddball created in response to the success of the mid-engined Lancia Stratos in rallying and given an unlikely elegance by Marcello Gandini at Bertone. Its longitudinal, mid-mounted 1397cc four was good for 160bhp, a towering figure for a sub-1000kg car in the early '80s. Fewer than 2000 5 Turbos were built, their whole the sum of some eclectic parts, from Alpine A310 suspension through lightweight aluminium panels to a fever dream of an interior.

The later 2 was more numerous (more than 3000 were built),

RENAULT 5 TURBO 2

PRICE THEN/VALUE NOW £8.5k/£90k

POWERTRAIN 1397cc 8v turbocharged inline-four, five-speed manual, rear-wheel drive

PERFORMANCE 160bhp @ 6000rpm, 155lb ft @ 3250rpm, 7.7sec 0-62mph, 126mph

LEGACY The wild competition-only Maxi; *Max Power*'s wide-arch obsession; the Clio V6

TURBO
C929 CTR
RENAULT 5
Turbo 2

more affordable and only slightly heavier. This 38,000-mile 2 from 1984 belonged to George Thatcher, marketing man at specialists 4 Star Classics in Hampshire.

'It's just great fun, and I like this car's rare colour, Bleu Marine – most of them are white or red,' he tells me. 'Don't get me wrong. Compared with a Delta Integrale, a 5 Turbo simply isn't as fast. And it's not up there with the greatest driver's cars of all time, either. But there's so much drama to the way they drive, and for me it's the ultimate '80s hot hatch. It's loud, there's decent midrange and things get exciting when the turbo spools up.

'They were a good rally car too [particularly on twisty tarmac – 5s won the Monte three times]. We just sold this one. The more desirable Turbo 1s are somewhere between £110k and £140k. In terms of running one, there are specialists like 3S Developpement [3sdeveloppement.fr] who can get parts. And JPR Classics [jprclassics.co.uk] are a good bet for servicing in the UK – setting up the mechanical fuel injection is an art form, and they're sensitive cars.'

Sensitive and spectacular.

BEN MILLER

The hot hatch legend wasn't built on leather and wood

Rally-style extra lights part of the look, ideally with covers still on

RENAULT'S HOT HATCH ICONS

For a long time the hot hatch standard bearer, Renault took the type very seriously and plans to do so again – an Alpine version of the rebooted electric 5 is in the product plan. Finding a 5 GT Turbo that isn't crash-damaged, rotten or modified is tricky. Clio Williams are desirable and achingly collectable, as are V6 Clios: 'Cool things, if not as fun to drive as a 5 Turbo, but £50k-£60k now for a nice one,' says George Thatcher. 'Clio 200 Cups are a good buy,' says his 4 Star colleague Jim Gillett. 'They look good, they're superb to drive and they're affordable – you can get a good one for £10k, which I think is amazing value.'

SUBARU IMPREZA

NOT A HATCH. BUT VERY HOT

And so began our brief but passionate fling with rally-bred Japanese oddities

I couldn't take my eyes off it. I was captivated. It was the summer holidays, I was 10 years old and we were in Wales visiting family friends. Their son, also visiting, had a red Alfa 164 but it turned invisible when I saw the metallic silver creation parked alongside. Foglight covers like a rally car, gold wheels, that continuous one-piece-arc rear wing. It was an Impreza WRX STi (Version IV, it turned out), and it belonged to his friend Geraint, coincidentally popping round to visit too.

Everyone went inside for a cup of tea and a chat but I stayed on the driveway, transfixed, circling the Impreza like it was a grounded UFO. After a while, Geraint appeared, and asked if I'd like a ride in it. Really? Yes!

I climbed onto the front passenger sports seat's bumpy fabric topography and my dad hopped in the back. I remember the rest of the interior looked a bit disappointingly ordinary. The boxer engine fired and settled into an unusual gruff, thrummy idle sound. We rumbled away into traffic and, initially, my excitement petered away. This is just an ordinary car after all. It feels like our family Austin Montego.

Then the road unwound onto a short, well-sighted straight and suddenly we were overtaking one, two, three cars in one gear. 'The nice thing is, you're not on the wrong side of the road for very long…' I remember Geraint saying. That unfamiliar gruff engine sound was back, louder now, and acceleration like I'd never felt before. And grip. I didn't know a car could corner like this. (Back then, I know now, not many could.) On the same straight on the way back, now deserted, he demo'd the brakes, which impressed me even more than everything else so far. And when we returned to the village, it turned back into a normal car. 'That's what impresses me,' I remember him saying. 'That it can be both.' (He wasn't a nutter, by the way. I remember my dad, as good an arbiter of safe driving as I've ever known, commenting later that Geraint drove us as safely as he did quickly.)

I've wanted a WRX STi ever since. I was a student when they were cheap, and therefore couldn't afford one. As an adult, the cheap ones were too ratty or too questionably modified and the good ones – like this immaculate Turbo 2000 advertised by 4 Star Classics – are good money. Although, at £14,995, this car's not out of reach.

Some very much are. The 22B – the Holy Grail of Imprezas – is

Visual simplicity of this generation was never topped

worth £170k+. The 1000-off, blue-only two-door P1 is iconic too and £10k for a very rough car but £45k top-dollar. The 444-off RB5 (RB for Richard Burns, the 2001 world rally champion taken too soon) can top £35k but tidy sub-£20k cars are out there.

There have been great later-generation Impreza models since, too. But there's something so pure about that early car's shape. So much so that artist Benedict Radcliffe recreated it as a fluorescent wire-frame sculpture in 2005. He knew a good thing when he saw it; even at 10, I knew I had too.

JAMES TAYLOR

SUBARU'S HOT HATCH ICONS

The Impreza was always a saloon or estate rather than a true hatch shape until the controversial 2007 third generation. But it's always had the same mix of everyday usefulness and performance that makes the hot-hatch recipe so tasty, plus the fairy dust of 555-liveried WRC glory. The bug-eyed second GD generation arrived in 2000 and the 2002 Peter Stevens 'blob-eye' restyle included the Petter Solberg-honed S203 special edition. But the hottest hatch version was 2010's STi Cosworth CS400: 75 cars with box arches, the thick end of 400bhp, less than four seconds on the stopwatch to 62mph. For many, it was the last great hot Impreza.

SUBARU IMPREZA TURBO 2000

PRICE THEN/VALUE NOW £17k/£15k

POWERTRAIN 1994cc 16v turbocharged boxer-four, five-speed manual, all-wheel drive

PERFORMANCE 208bhp @ 5600rpm, 214lb ft @ 4000rpm, 5.8sec 0-60mph, 137mph

LEGACY Ever more niche Imprezas; countless beanie and anorak sales; Prodrive's restomod P25

LANCIA DELTA INTEGRALE EVO 2

SAFE-TO-MEET HERO

Never has racing improved the breed so obviously as with the none-more-’80s Delta

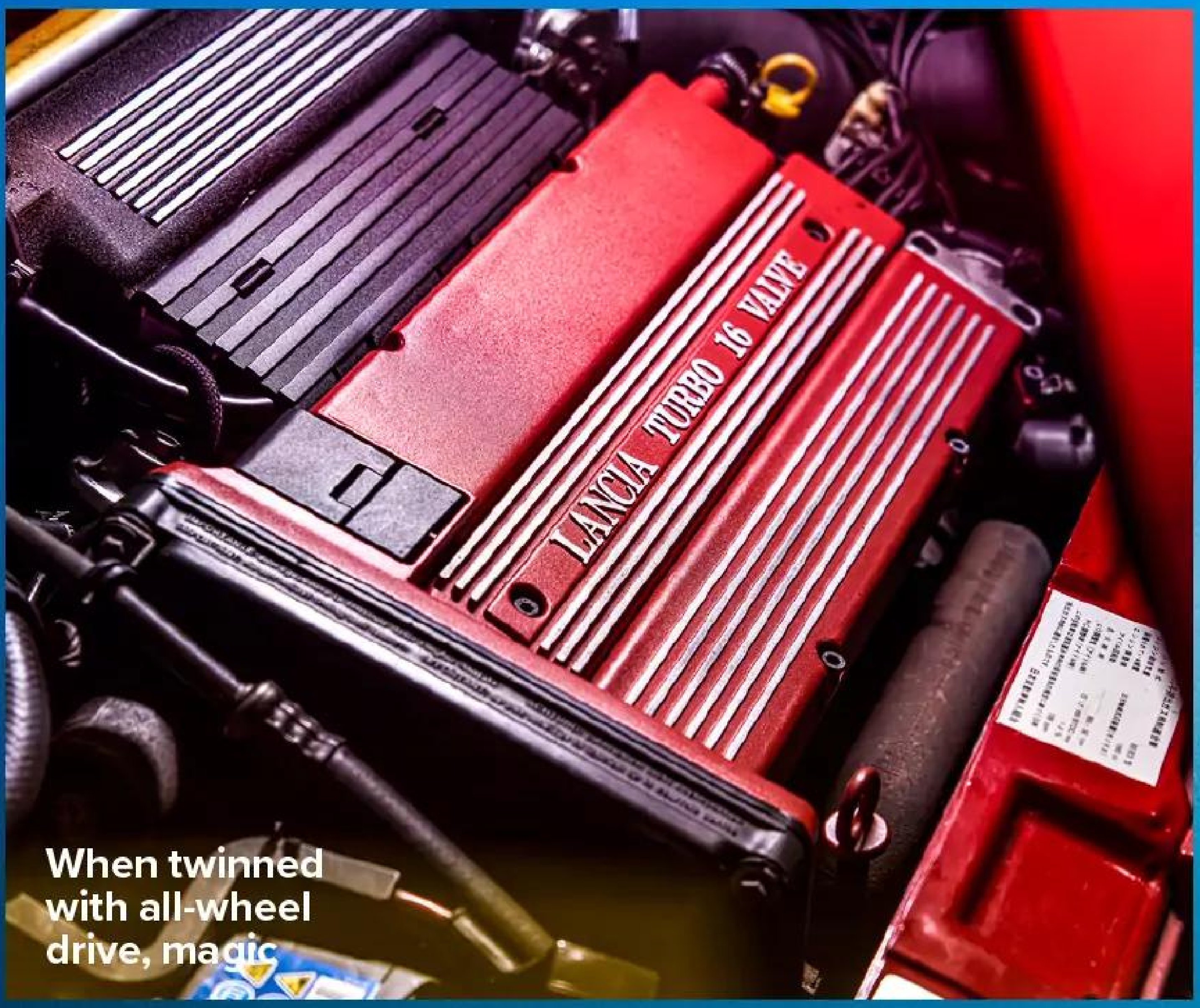
4 Star’s Jim Gillett is unequivocal: ‘In terms of heroes it’s safe to meet, there are two: the Delta Integrale and the Peugeot 205 GTI. Integrales still feel special. They’re light, the driving position and steering wheel placement are perfect, you’ve got the superb visibility thanks to the slim pillars, they’re fast and they just grip – you can really lean on them. Yes, they’re classically Italian, in that the cheap plastic interior trim squeaks as you go, but they’re awesome to drive and you can uprate them pretty easily, from a little more power to nearly 300bhp.

‘People always want these cars, and in part because they were sold in the UK – there’s that nostalgia. For me, looks-wise, they’re like a Mk2 Golf GTI on steroids, with the wide arches and double headlights. I always wanted one back then. Still do.’

You and me both, Jim.

That the Integrale Evo 2 was descended from the unassuming if elegant Giugiaro-penned five-door hatch Lancia introduced in 1979 is perhaps the greatest single example of racing improving the breed. The original Delta may have scooped European Car of the Year honours in 1980 but it wasn’t until 1983, and the turbocharged HF, that things began to warm up. The Delta now had one of its magic ingredients. The other, four-wheel drive, arrived in production guise with the Delta HF 4WD in 1986 but had been in development long before that, using a modified version of the S4 rally car’s powertrain.

With the end of the ferocious – and ferociously dangerous – Group B era, Lancia’s high-performance and reliable four-


When twinned with all-wheel drive, magic

Dials within dials within rectangles

LANCIA DELTA INTEGRALE EVO 2

PRICE THEN/VALUE NOW £25k/£84k

POWERTRAIN 1995cc 16v turbocharged inline-four, five-speed manual, all-wheel drive

PERFORMANCE 212bhp @ 5750rpm, 232lb ft @ 2500rpm, 5.7sec 0-62mph, 137mph

LEGACY NOT the 2007 Lancia Delta

wheel-drive system, with its three differentials, became a key asset. If power could no longer deliver a competitive edge (and it couldn't, thanks to Group A's baked-in turbo restrictors) then making the most of the power you did have was key. The Group A Delta HF 4WD won the '87 season opener and that season's championships for both driver and manufacturer.

And from there the Delta just kept getting faster. A 16-valve engine, with corresponding bonnet bulge, arrived in 1989, and the type peaked with Evoluzione in 1991. Lancia won the last of its six consecutive constructors' titles in 1992, and the Evo 2 – which wasn't sold to homologate a competition car – was its lantern-jawed gift to the world.

Values for the ultra-rare, Japan-only Final Edition cars, finished as they were in heart-stoppingly perfect Rosso Amaranto with a yellow and blue stripe, continue to pull Delta Integrale values north. A low-mileage Final Edition sold for £225k a couple of years ago. But Evo 2s are still the right side of £100k. This 70,000-mile Monza Red example is up for £84k. A heroic amount of money for a 30-year-old five-door, sure, but this is the humble hatchback at its most heroic.

BEN MILLER

LANCIA'S HOT HATCH ICONS

Less exotic Deltas are thin on the ground – the money's always been in the Integrales, and that's ensured their survival. 4 Star's Jim Gillett is a big Fulvia Coupe fan – 'There's the V4 engine, with its pretty unique sound, disc brakes all round, five-speed gearbox… pretty modern for a '60s car.' Not a hatchback but with a comparable blend of practicality and performance, the 1.3 Ss are more considerably affordable (£15k-£20k) than Delta Integrales – the 1.6 HF Fulvia Coupes (£50k-£60k) not so much…

FORD ESCORT RS COSWORTH

POST-OP

A dull Escort transformed by the genius of Ford Special Vehicle Operations

Has any car nabbed victory from the jaws of defeat quite like the Escort RS Cosworth? Georg Kacher told readers of *CAR*'s October 1990 issue 'there's little pleasure to be gained from driving the new Escorts and Orions', only for Ford Special Vehicle Operations to pull the Escort RS Cosworth from its hat two years later: a Group A WRC special so desirable and exciting it rarely remained where you parked it.

The king Escort isn't really an Escort at all, of course, as oversized bodywork designed by the now defunct MGA Developments strongly suggests – and nor was it truly victorious, judged against its avowed mission of winning the WRC.

The Cosworth suffix relates to the YB engine – a donkey's-old Pinto block mated to a far more sophisticated Cosworth twin-cam turbo head. It drives through a five-speed manual and sends power to 16-inch alloys via an all-wheel-drive system that splits power 34:66 front to rear.

These are Sierra Sapphire Cosworth 4x4 mechanicals wrapped up with the bad attitude of the original (and closely related) three-door Sierra Cosworth, wild rear wing and all. There's Escort in there somewhere, but only in the same way there's shot in a pheasant.

A minimum 2500 Escort Cossies had to be produced for Group A homologation requirements, but 7145 actually rolled from coachbuilder Karmann's German plant from 1992 until 1996.

The first 2500 cars had a T3 Garrett 'big turbo' set-up well suited to motorsport but laggy for the road. The remainder downsized to a T25 blower once homologation requirements were satisfied – power dropped a fraction from 224bhp to 217bhp, there was less tuning potential, but this is the more driveable standard road engine. The Cossie never won the World Rally Championship, but François Delecour clinched second on its 1993 Monte Carlo debut and took overall victory ahead of Evos, Imprezas and Celicas the following year.

This Monte Carlo from 4 Star Classics is one of only 200 examples built to celebrate that success. Finished in Mallard Green, it has 'Motorsport'-logo'd cloth Recaros, 16-inch OZ Racing alloys that do a fair impression of the wheels the works car wore and the must-have rear wing – a delete option on later models. It's yours for £74,995, or half as much as the most expensive example we could find advertised in the UK.

A WRC championship might have eluded it, but the Escort RS Cosworth was a success in the showroom and provided a much-needed halo not just for a humdrum Escort range, but for the entire Ford line-up. Two out of three ain't bad.

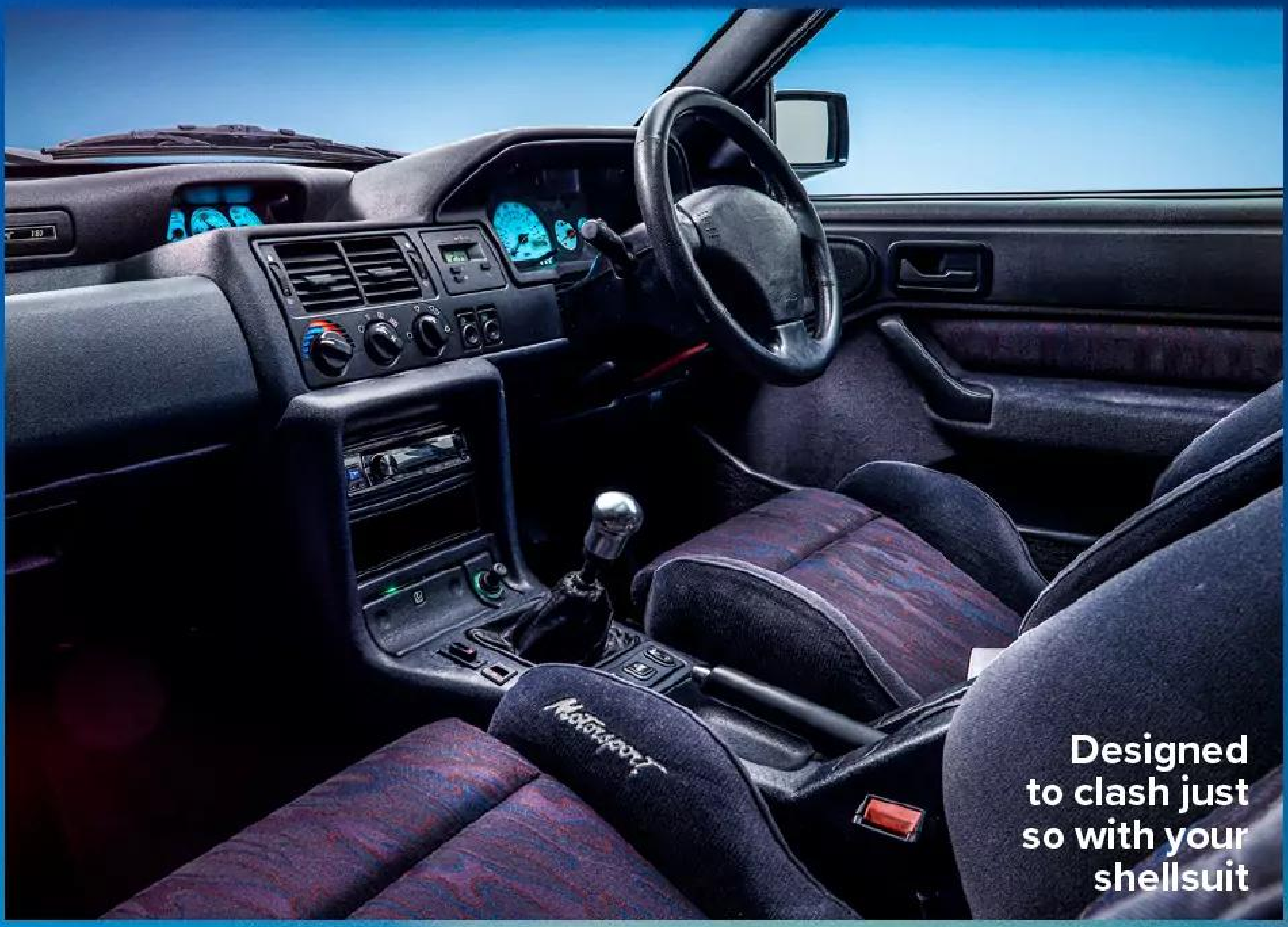
BEN BARRY

FORD ESCORT COSWORTH

PRICE THEN/VALUE NOW £26k/£75k
POWERTRAIN 1993cc 16v turbocharged inline-four, five-speed manual, all-wheel drive
PERFORMANCE 217bhp @ 6250rpm, 214lb ft @ 3500rpm, 6.1sec 0-62mph, 140mph
LEGACY Ford's last Cosworth and final rally-bred homologation special

Monte
OZ RACING
FALKEN

Peak power comes just shy of that redline



Designed to clash just so with your shellsuit

FORD'S HOT HATCH ICONS

The XR3i was the entry point to 'quick' MkV Escort ownership, offered with a new 1.8-litre 16v Zetec engine in either 113bhp or 128bhp tune. All quick MkV Escorts can be had as three-door hatches, but only the XR3i can be had as a two-door convertible for the full Harry Enfield. The MkV Escort RS2000 is the next best thing to an Escort RS Cosworth, and preceded it in 1991. Its 2.0-litre 16v engine is good for 148bhp, but only pre-facelift models get the cool double bonnet bulges and flush front grille. They're available with front- or all-wheel drive. The RS2000 is rare and collectible but remains one of the least valuable Ford RS models today. Values won't go mad but that could be one to watch.

VW GOLF G60 LIMITED

IF YOU KNOW...

Under-the-radar looks give few clues to the innovations and thrills lurking within

The Mk1 Golf was both a big leap for Volkswagen – which up to that point had been defined by the Beetle – and simultaneously a cautious toe in the water, as its largely conservative line-up attests. But the Mk2 flipped that logic on its head. This time the fundamentals evolved only gently, but VW went bananas with some of the Mk2's many variants.

Broadly there are three hi-perf Mk2s, dubbed GTI, G60 and Rallye. All are highly collectible today but none compares with the exclusivity of the Golf G60 Limited – a Mk2 that combines all the innovations and options of its siblings with an understated, school-run-friendly body. Kind of Golf does original BMW M5.

Just 71 examples were hand-assembled at Volkswagen Motorsport, Hanover, all left-hookers. This 1989 example is number 16, has covered 67,000 miles and is up for £57k at 4 Star.

New technology birthed these blossoming Mk2 Golf derivatives – notably a 16-valve head for GTIs, Syncro all-wheel drive offered even for basic CLs and a 'G-lader' supercharger for go-faster models that lorded it over GTIs.

The Rallye homologation special (of which 5000 units were mandated for Group A competition) corralled most of that tech but lacked VW's 16-valve head. Power was capped at 160bhp.

Assembled alongside rally cars (unlike the Rallye) and overseen by VW Motorsport boss Klaus-Peter Rosorius, the G60 Limited ditches the Rallye's three-door bodyshell and flares for a five-door body so discreet it's almost mischievously understated.

Its paint is grey as a Wolfsburg winter and the two-headlight grille and slim bumpers look meek when the GTIs were all quad headlamps and big bumpers. Blue edging round the grille, VW Motorsport badging and 15-inch BBS RM alloys are telltales for spotters, but butter wouldn't melt.

Under the bonnet is a different matter. A 1.8-litre supercharged engine related to the G60 and Rallye gets – for the first time – Volkswagen's 16-valve cylinder head. Power shoots up to 207bhp while Syncro all-wheel drive and Rallye-spec suspension render it all entirely usable. It's enough for 6.8 seconds to 60mph with a 140mph top end – E30 M3 performance.

The relatively luxurious interior is in stark contrast to its motorsport-bred performance and understated looks. There's full-leather upholstery, heated front seats, onboard computer, THIS STORY ORIGINALLY APPEARED IN THE **MARCH 2023 ISSUE OF *CAR***

VW GOLF G60 LIMITED

PRICE THEN/VALUE NOW £27k/£57k

POWERTRAIN 1781cc 16v supercharged inline-four, five-speed manual, all-wheel drive

PERFORMANCE 207bhp @ 6500rpm, 186lb ft @ 5000rpm, 6.8sec 0-60mph, 140mph

LEGACY Closest VW came to the Golf R before the Golf R

Limited was first supercharged G60 with 16-valve head

electric windows and mirrors, plus power-assisted steering and ABS as standard.

It's a luxurious street sleeper where modern sports-car collectibles are all outta-my-way looks and stripped-out innards – and that only makes us desire a G60 Limited all the more.

BEN BARRY

With huge thanks to 4 Star Classics (01420 479909) for their assistance – check their inventory at 4starclassics.com

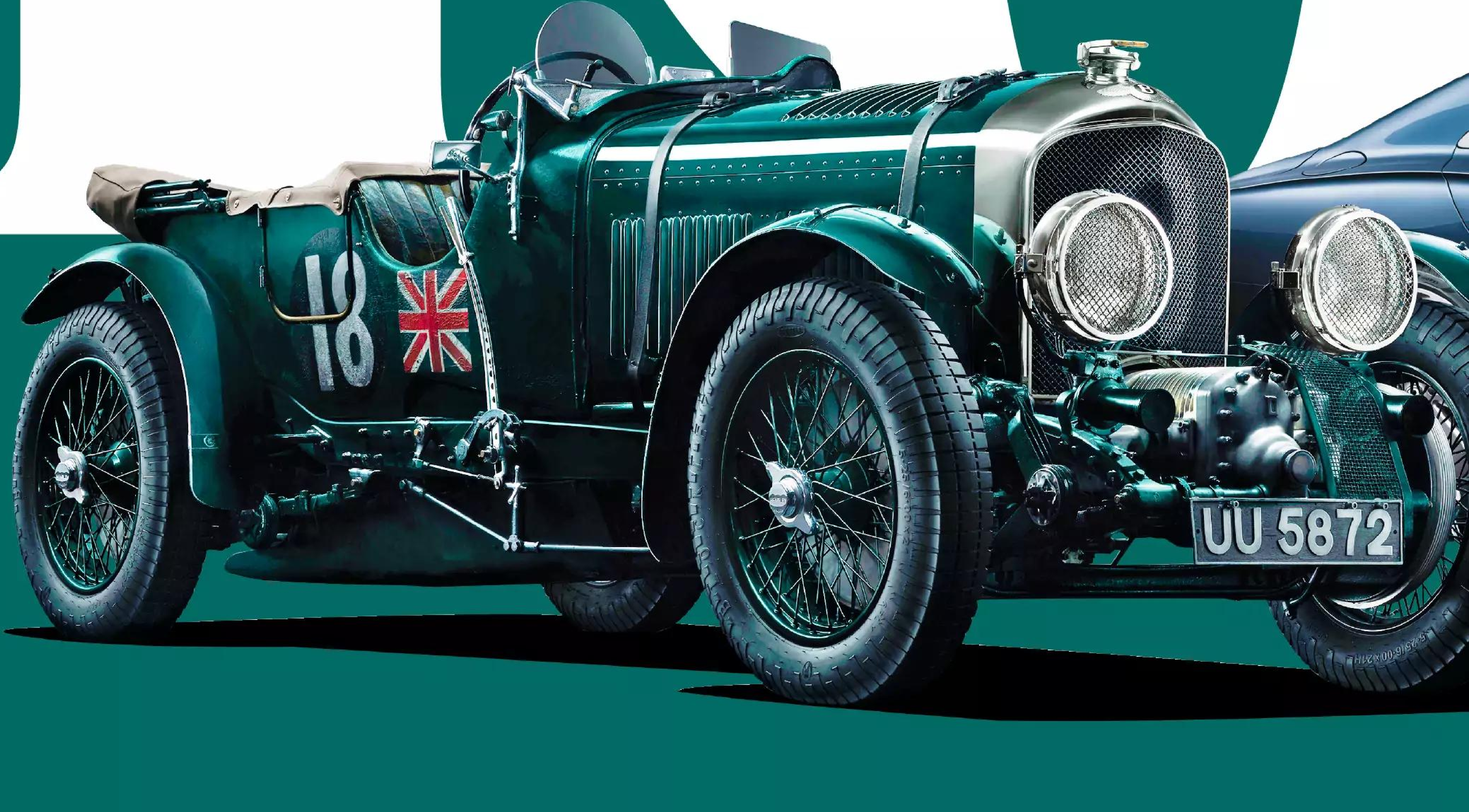
VW'S HOT HATCH ICONS

The Mk2 VW Golf GTI picked up the baton from the Mk1 in 1984, subtly evolving its look and eight-valve 1.8-litre engine, before a 16-valve version joined the line-up in 1985 – bumping performance from 112bhp to 139bhp in the process, though the 8v continued. The Rallye debuted in 1989 with a 1.8-litre supercharged engine good for 160bhp, plus there was all-wheel drive as well as boxy arches and new skirts/bumpers for its three-door body. Meanwhile 1990's G60 kept the Rallye's power but ditched the arches, was usually front-wheel drive (Syncro all-wheel drive was offered) and could be had in both three- and five-door bodies. Only GTIs come in both left- or right-hand drive. **car**

10

YEARS OF

A century of big characters, exquisite engineering, broken hearts,



BENTLEY

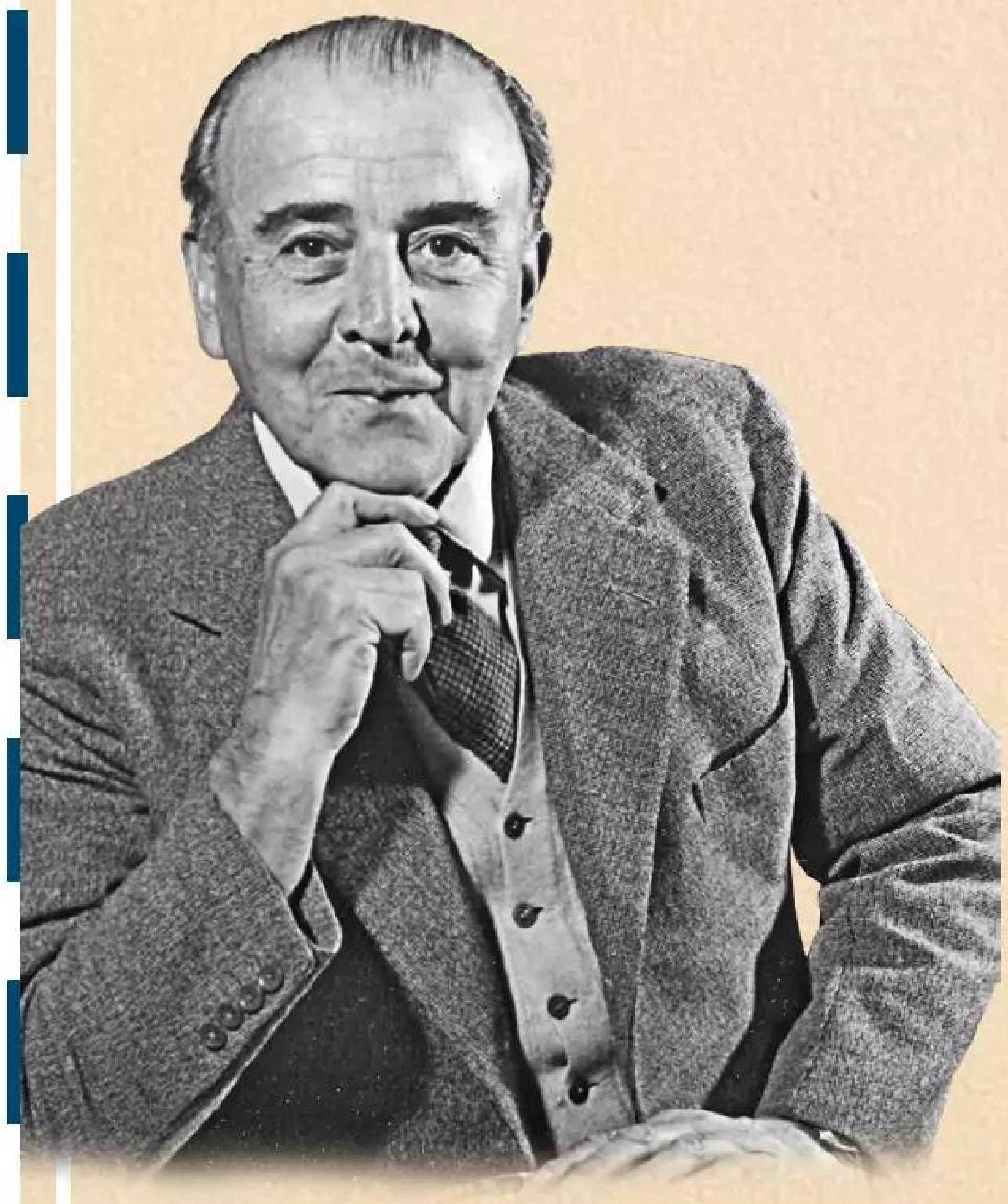
fierce rivalries, mighty engines and some really rather good cars

CLONING THE BLOWER | DRIVING THE FLYING SPUR WITH THE BOSS | CLASHING WITH ASTON MARTIN IN THE ALPS…

Mapping Bentley's first century

The Bentley legend was forged all over the world, from battlefields to Brooklands

Words Steve Moody



① DONCASTER

WO Bentley was a locomotive obsessive – a 'devoted slave' he called himself. It doesn't take a huge leap of the imagination to see a connection between the hefty Mulsanne limo and his four-year apprenticeship in the Yorkshire rail yards of the Great Northern.

② THE ISLE OF MAN

How close was Bentley Motors to never existing? In his first proper race, the 1909 Isle of Man TT, WO crashed his bike into a wall at 50mph. 'Luckily, I took the brunt of the shock with my chest, rather than my head,' he would later recall. Further visits cemented his reputation as a decent racer.

③ WEST LONDON

At the National Motor Cab company, Bentley learnt how to manage car repairs and drivers. In 1912, WO and brother HM started Bentley & Bentley, the UK sales concession in Hanover Street for DFP, and took on some hill-climbs in the French dasher. After the war, Conduit Street and New Street Mews became the HQ workshops of the new Bentley Motors – at least until the bellowing engines demanded relocation to a less populous area.

④ BROOKLANDS

The name of an eccentrically brilliant coupe (and less brilliant saloon), Brooklands in Surrey is steeped in Bentley folklore. WO took part in his first car race on its banked curves in 1913, finishing second. Victories followed and drivers such as Birkin and Barnato cut their endurance-racing teeth in numerous races through the '20s.

⑤ THE WESTERN FRONT

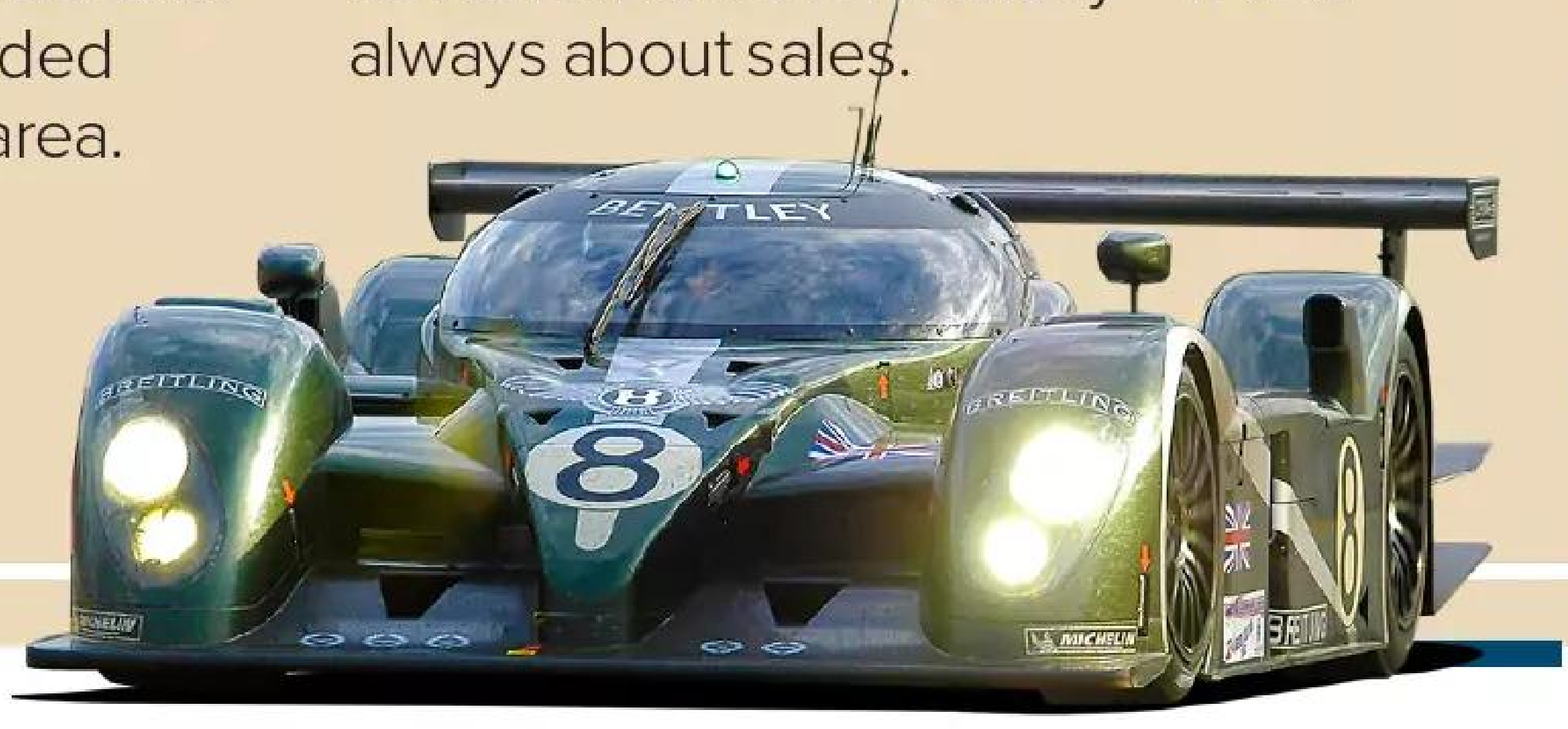
Bentley's revolutionary BR1 aero engine, built at Humber in Coventry, took over from failing Clerget motors on the Western Front. The more powerful BR2, when fitted to a Sopwith Snipe, was a deadly combination. Come the end of the war, the Royal Commission awarded WO £8000 – enough to set up Bentley.

⑥ CRICKLEWOOD

The British car industry was ensconced in the Midlands, but Bentley wanted a London address. Oxgate Lane became the base for a decade of remarkable sporting, if not commercial, success. Its location certainly attracted the right sort of chap: the current Lord March's grandfather worked in the service station as a mechanic for a time, learning the ropes.

⑦ LE MANS

'We got such a hold on the Sarthe race that, by degrees, we succeeded in driving out the opposition, the most successful and economical way I know of winning a race,' said WO. Success at Le Mans (dominance in the '20s, that win in 2003) was never about romance for Bentley – it was always about sales.



⑧ CANNES

Not only the start line for Woolf Barnato's Blue Train race, but also WO's favourite holiday spot and the blueprint destination for the GT driving experience Bentley embodies. WO loved to cruise down through France to the coast in a day, 'hour-by-hour by myself, chewing a few apples and sandwiches on the way'.

⑨ GROSVENOR SQUARE

Home of the Bentley Boys. WO: 'The public liked to imagine them living in Mayfair flats, drinking champagne in clubs, playing the horses and the stock exchange, and beating furiously around racetracks at the weekend. Of several of them, this was not an inaccurate picture.'

⑩ DERBY

'The sad survivors of an extinct motor car' were sent north after Rolls-Royce bought the collapsed firm for £125,275 in 1931, starting a 60-year-plus badge-engineering project.

⑪ CREWE

A potato field with good access to the nearby railways, the Pyms Lane site was bought by Rolls in 1938. It wasn't until 1946 that the first Bentley, the Mark VI, rolled off the production line as Merlin engine production took precedence during the war. Crewe now employs some 4000 workers.

⑫ WOLFSBURG

The carve-up of Rolls and Bentley assets in 1998 was a messy bodge, with neither VW nor BMW getting what it thought it had bought. But the subsequent wrangling eventually produced a great result all round: VW invested heavily in Bentley, BMW in Rolls, and both thrived.

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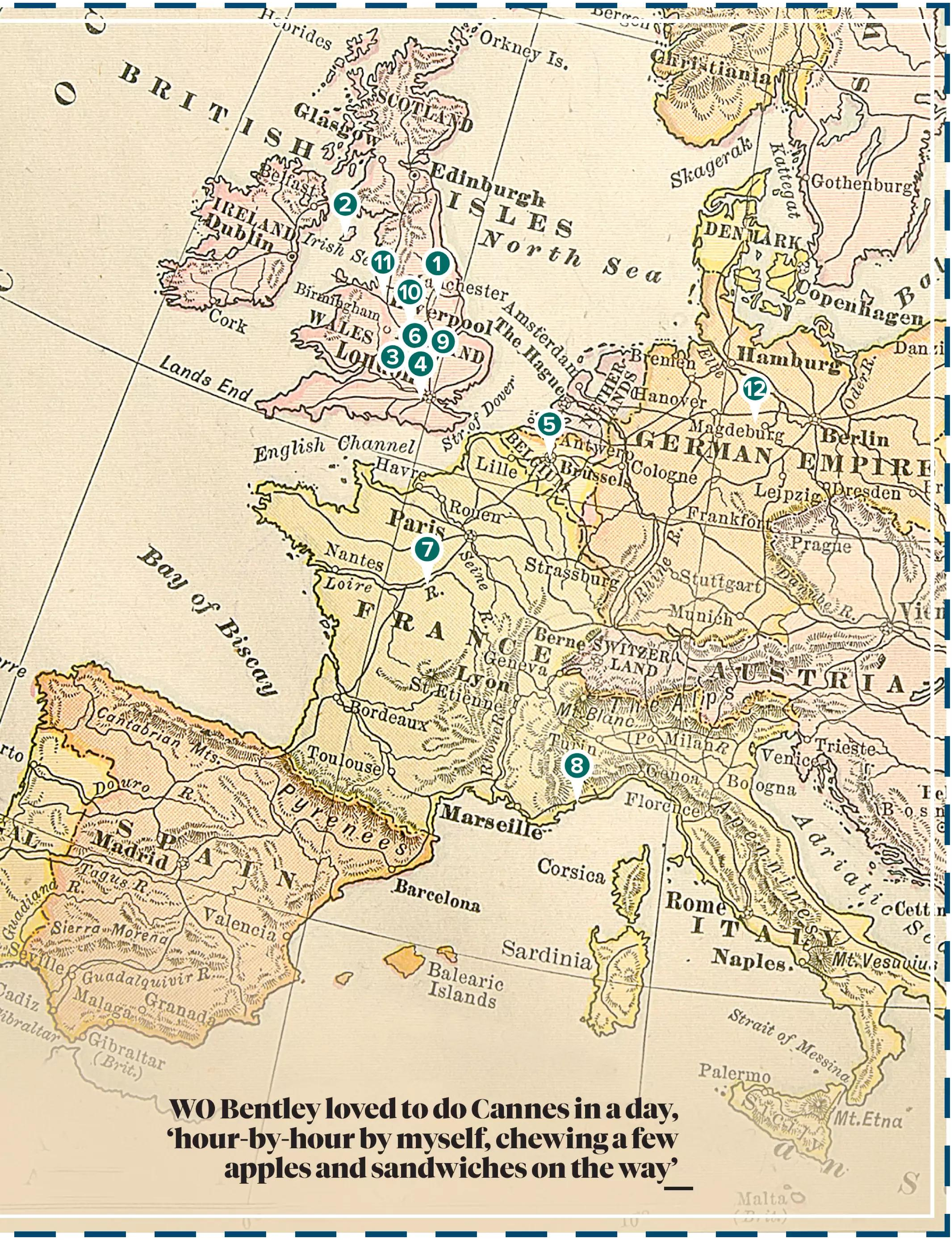
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Seine R.
Strassburg
Rhine R.
Stuttgart
Danube R.
Munich
FRANCE
Berne
SWITZERLAND
Geneva
AUSTRIA
Lyon
St Etienne
The Alps
Mt. Blanc
Rhone R.
Bordeaux
Turin
Po
Milan
Venice
Trieste
Toulouse
Genoa
Bologna
Florence
Marseille
Pyrenees
Bay of Biscay
Cantabrian Mts.
Douro R.
SPAIN
Madrid
Tagus R.
Guadiana
Sierra Morena
Valencia
Seville
Guadalquivir R.
Cadiz
Malaga
Granada
Gibraltar (Brit.)
Barcelona
Balearic Islands
Corsica
Sardinia
Rome
ITALY
Apennines
Adriatic Sea
Naples.
Mt. Vesuvius
Strait of Messina
Palermo
Sicily
Mt. Etna
Malta (Brit.)

WO Bentley loved to do Cannes in a day, 'hour-by-hour by myself, chewing a few apples and sandwiches on the way'

ADRIAN HALLMARK | BENTLEY CHAIRMAN & CEO

‘I enjoy crises. I just don’t want to create them’

A fan of its heritage but focused on the future, Adrian Hallmark is leading Bentley into the biggest upheaval of its spectacularly unstable 100-year history

Words Gavin Green **Photography** Richard Pardon

THIS INTERVIEW ORIGINALLY APPEARED IN THE **DECEMBER 2019 ISSUE OF *CAR***

The Bentley Boys loved the south of France. That band of wealthy bon viveurs, adventurers and racing drivers holidayed and partied there like there was no tomorrow. (There nearly wasn't, several times.) Woolf Barnato, most successful of them all on the track, and a former chairman of Bentley, raced the Blue Train from Cannes to Calais in 1930. He wagered £200 that he could beat the train and set off from the Carlton Bar in Cannes in his Speed Six. He was so far ahead by the time he got to Calais, he continued to the Conservative Club in St James's Street, London, arriving four minutes before the Blue Train reached Calais.

Adrian Hallmark, current boss of Bentley Motors, also likes the south of France. Many of his customers live there, and his family home is not far away. Named Chalet Birkin after his favourite Bentley Boy, Sir Henry 'Tim' Birkin, it nestles in the Grand Massif and is perfect for his favourite sports, skiing, motocross riding and road cycling. Inside there is a vast painting of Birkin at Le Mans in 1930, commissioned by Hallmark.

So Bentley's chairman and CEO reveres Birkin, but he also loves the car he helped to develop, the Blower. His exploits in the Blower are proof that Adrian Hallmark is not your typical suit, tie and spreadsheet car boss. Now, I've driven a Blower Bentley, and it's without doubt the most physically demanding car I've ever piloted, from shoulder-heaving steering to meaty and difficult gearshift to leg-press-heavy clutch and brake. Yet Hallmark cheerfully drove the 1929 ex-Birkin car owned by Bentley from the UK to Brescia in Italy in 2001, competed in the Mille Miglia 1000-mile retro rally, and drove it back again. That's about 3000 miles in a 90-year-old vintage racer. He says it was the best drive of his life, physical though it was.

'I ran it in after we bought it and refurbished it, before driving it to Italy. My upper neck, tops of shoulders and backs of arms are still in recovery. My respect for those Bentley Boys who raced it is absolute.'

THE MAN, THE CAR, THE COFFEE

▲

Adrian Hallmark

Chairman and CEO of Bentley. During a previous stint, as sales and marketing director, he launched the Continental GT. In between he worked for VW, Saab and JLR.

▲

Flying Spur

Crewe's latest limo is the fastest saloon in the world. A leather- and wood-lined piece of finely crafted four-wheeled decadence that can do 207mph and 0-60 in 3.7sec.

▲

Double espresso

No sugar in Hallmark's double espresso. We sip coffee overlooking Monaco Harbour but he more usually drinks his espressos from china in his Crewe office.

Bentleys aren't the exception in Monte Carlo; they rule the road

His exploits in the Blower prove he's not a suit, tie and spreadsheet car boss

This year he was back behind the wheel of the Blower again at a trackday at Laguna Seca. He shows me a photo of him spinning it.

Today, we're in Monte Carlo, surely the single place on Earth with the highest concentration of new Bentleys. On Casino Square, the world's most exotic car park, I count more Bentleys than any other make of car (Mercedes, Porsche and Ferrari close behind). The tourists spend more time photographing the cars than the casino, the Hotel de Paris, or the view of the Med.

So Monte Carlo was an appropriate place for Bentley to launch the new Flying Spur. This is an astonishing leather- and wood-lined limo with pillow-soft rear head restraints and a built-in fridge between the rear seats. It weighs 2.4 tonnes, yet in the right mood on the right road it can sprint to 60mph from rest in 3.7 seconds and can do 207mph, the fastest saloon in the world. No car can combine luxury limo and fire-breathing sports saloon quite so emphatically as the 12-cylinder 626bhp Flying Spur. We first drive it with Hallmark. It's eerily quiet and simple to steer, helped by amazing four-wheel steering that enables it to pivot on its axis like a small hatch at low speed. It's some contrast from the dear old Blower.

Hallmark joined as chairman and CEO, from JLR, in February 2018. It's his second stint at Bentley. First time around he served as sales and marketing director, from 1999 to 2005, when he launched the Continental GT, the car that transformed Bentley. He says he became a 'Bentley boy' before that, in his previous role as managing director of Porsche in the UK.

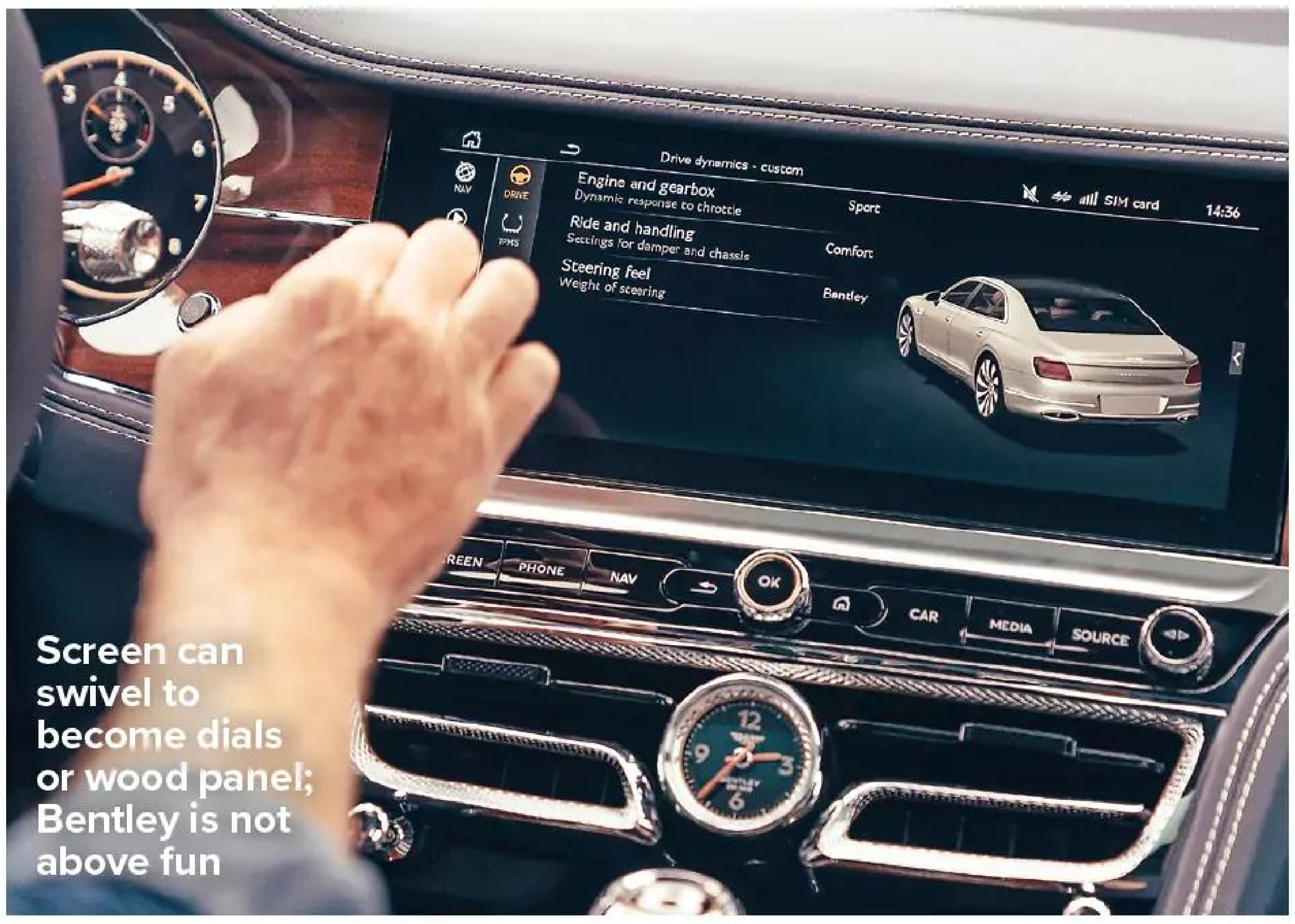
'I did a study on them while I worked at Porsche. I remember thinking they had massive potential: the history was so rich. But it wasn't until I joined and we had the challenge of taking a brand that was 80 years old and sold 36,000 cars in those 80 years and now had to sell 10,000 cars a year. What is it in the DNA that could be transported into the future? What could fill the emotional gap that was definitely there? Everyone respected Bentley, but it was so niche. After that, I really got into it.

'WO Bentley said that he didn't know of any car maker that had achieved so much in its first 11 years. From a small stable in Marylebone to five Le Mans wins, a globally recognised brand, astonishing innovation and the myths and legends of probably the most charismatic bunch of racing drivers in history – well, it gets to you. I'm not obsessive about many things, but I'm obsessive about Bentley.' ▶

Flying Spur shares some of the Bentley Blower's DNA but none of its pain

‘I have never, ever desired a saloon. But this is the best car I’ve ever been in’

ADRIAN HALLMARK



Screen can swivel to become dials or wood panel; Bentley is not above fun

Mind you, after 12 years – this was 1931 – Bentley went bankrupt. It was bought by rival Rolls-Royce, the start of a rollercoaster ride lasting almost 70 years, during which the brand was debased into building badge-engineered Rolls-Royces. Yet it wasn't all bad news. The comely R-Type Continental, often cited as Bentley's finest car and almost certainly the most beautiful, was born during this period (in 1952) and so was the first Flying Spur saloon of 1957.

The rollercoaster didn't end until VW bought Bentley in 1998, hiring Hallmark soon after. His task was to bring the new Continental GT to market and boost Bentley's sales ten-fold. It almost single-handedly grew the luxury car market five-fold, and Bentley remains the world's best-selling luxury car brand. What other single vehicle has so comprehensively transformed a car maker and a market sector? Mind you, Hallmark's first year in charge as CEO saw Bentley's worst loss in 10 years under VW (£253 million), sales down 10 per cent and revenue down 14 per cent. Dark whisperings from senior VW Group shareholders said Bentley's performance was unacceptable.

'It was tough when I rejoined, but honestly I've never had so much fun. There is nothing better than a crisis to clear the mind and bring people together. It simplifies choices. I enjoy crises. I just don't want to create them.'

Hallmark promised his VW masters that he'd get Bentley profitable within two years and very probably within one. The big issue in 2018 was trying to certify Bentleys for new emissions regulations. 'Fifty per cent of our cars in 50 per cent of our markets have not been legal for the past year and a half. Not just Europe. China and US too. So we couldn't sell them. Now, they're all switching on.'

The new Flying Spur uses the latest Crewe-built W12. A luxury saloon that weighs almost two and a half tonnes, does 19mpg and emits 337g of CO2 every kilometre sounds about as 21st century as the *Flying Scotsman*.

'It's the car for an era. Attitudes are now shifting way quicker than at any time in our lives. If we were setting out today to do a brand new W12, I'd seriously question that. We made the decision for this car seven or eight years ago. It's fully compliant, it pumps out 40 or 50 per cent less CO2 than the original W12, and a lot of wealthy people want a car like this, not least here in Monte Carlo.'

Hallmark wants Bentley sales to grow from the 10,000 units a year it has consistently registered since the first Continental GT and Flying Spur were launched over a decade ago. 'The number of people who can afford luxury cars globally is growing. Sales of luxury cars are growing. But we've been flat since 2006.'

He wants growth into the mid-teens, although he knows Bentley will never get anywhere near the global luxury market share it enjoyed after the Continental GT first went on sale – 66 per cent. ▶

HOW I GOT HERE

THE FIRST CAR JOB

'My first experience was washing cars at 14 in a garage in Wolverhampton. It funded my motocross. My parents said if you want to do it, you pay for it yourself. I got to national level and never hurt myself. After I stopped competing I kept riding until I had the biggest crash of my life, not long after I joined Bentley, aged 39. Collarbone, seven ribs and fractured pelvis. I had a presentation to Piëch [VW CEO] just after. He asked if it was a golfing accident.'

ON THE UP

'After school, I was sponsored to work and study with an engineering company that did nuclear power station maintenance. I still worked at the garage on Saturdays, and they bought the remnants of March [the former racing car maker and F1 team]. I stacked and catalogued all the parts before selling them. I ended up at 25 running that dealership, selling Volvos.'

10
TRAVELERS

BENTLEY CALLS

'I became Porsche UK MD at 33 and joined Bentley at 36. After that I worked for VW in America and ran VW Asia from Wolfsburg. I briefly went to Saab, then Jaguar, then Bentley again.'

Five rear-seat massage modes to try out. Hallmark looks like he's picked the winner

Autonomous? 'Forget it. I buy a Bentley because I love driving.' Sharing? 'Over my dead body'

Electric cars are on the way. 'Electric power suits our cars very well. It's quiet and effortless with instant torque. But until the power density of batteries improves, plug-in hybrids are the only electrified solutions for big cars. That means plug-in hybrids as well as conventional engines on all models.

'Our customers say, yes, overwhelmingly, bring it on. They're happy to drive a 12-cylinder now but they want an electric car in the future as long as it has the same capability.'

Autonomous? 'Forget it. I only buy a Bentley because I love driving my car. Yes, I may have a driver who drops me off for dinner somewhere, but I want to drive.'

Car sharing? 'Over my dead body. However, the idea of accessing a Bentley when travelling, that appeals.'

We drive from Monte Carlo to just south of Draguignan, nestling inland from the Riviera, partly on the Route Napoleon. It's about 80 miles. We return mainly on the autoroute. Super performance and effortlessness are the key qualities of a Bentley, says Hallmark. It's about floating along at speed but never feeling stressed.

The new Flying Spur borrows the platform and powertrain of the latest Continental GT, but is longer, heavier and has an all-new cockpit, apart from the upper dashboard. As we waft out of Monaco, on small, slow roads, the ride is cushion soft, the W12 purrs silently, and we're sitting in a cabin full of soft fragrant hides, fluted seats, finely burnished woods and beautifully knurled brightwork. Even the insides of the door handles are knurled.

There are fine details, none more than the three-sided central rotating panel that flips from digital touchscreen to classic analogue dials to a plain wood veneer finish. The clever 48-volt electrically controlled suspension and big new air springs help give an astonishingly supple ride. The 2.4 tonnes of heft probably help too. It may not be quite as low-speed-refined as the double-the-money Rolls-Royce Phantom. But it's close.

On the autoroute the big Spur powers silently along. Rear touchscreens allow back-benchers to control virtually all car functions. You can even raise or lower the newly designed Flying B on the prow. And choose five different seat massage modes.

So far, so big-limo impressive. But when we pull off the wide high-speed two- and three-laners onto the fine driving roads that cross the Alpes-Maritimes, we see the flip side of the Flying Spur. Select 'Sport' – though the standard 'Bentley' settings for engine, ride and steering are pretty good – and suddenly your two-and-half tonnes of 209-inch-long Bentley strips out of its tuxedo into its tracksuit.

The 48-volt anti-roll system now prioritises flat handling, not supple ride, and you can thread the big beast through the hairpins and fast corners with surprising gusto. The engine roars as it nears its 6000rpm power peak, and the torque lets you punch hard out of the tight corners, the four-wheel drive pawing at the tarmac. There is surely no saloon that can mix sport and suppleness like this Bentley. Look around the cabin, and you can't quite believe there is so much car behind you.

The new electric steering could be more feelsome, although the wheel itself is delightfully small-rimmed and sports orientated. Plus, you are aware of the mass over the nose. It's a surprisingly nimble car. But it still feels like a heavy one. The lighter V8 version, on sale next year, will probably be the better driver's choice.

Then Hallmark tells you, out of the blue, that he doesn't like saloons. 'I have never, ever desired a saloon,' he says, emphatically. And pauses. You sense a 'but'. Sure enough. 'I borrowed a new Flying Spur to drive to the airport to pick-up Diess [Herbert Diess, chairman of Volkswagen] and I remember thinking, this drives just as well as my new Continental GT. Then Diess and I jumped in the back together and we're sitting in this incredibly roomy car and it's so quiet and comfortable. It's more refined than a Mulsanne, it's as quick and good to drive as a GT, it's certainly better to drive than a Bentayga. It's the best car I've ever been in.'

So the boss of Bentley says it's Bentley's best car. I agree. It's been decades since we've been able to say that about a Bentley saloon. **car**

What happened next...

IN 2024 ADRIAN HALLMARK TOOK HIS EXPERTISE FROM BENTLEY TO ASTON MARTIN, WHERE HE IS FOCUSED ON MAKING ASTON CONSISTENTLY PROFITABLE

The fastest lorry in the world

Ettore Bugatti mocked racing Bentleys, but driving the new Conti GT3 is a revelation

1

LOOKS TOO HEFTY. SOMEHOW ISN'T

Cast an eye over the machinery the Continental GT3 does battle with in GT racing (Lamborghini Huracans, 720S McLarens…) and they appear half its height. But the first-generation Conti GT3 was a hugely successful machine and, like the road car on which it's based, the Mk2 is lighter, slipperier, smarter. Big, brash, but still elegant, the Conti looks like nothing else on the grid.

2

STANDARD BODY WITH A FEW* MODS

Like all GT3 racing cars, the Bentley begins life as a production bodyshell before getting a ground-up rebuild. The V8 engine's positioned so far back you can't help but glance into the cabin to check it isn't poking through the dashboard. The improved weight distribution makes the car more predictable on the limit and easier on its tyres than the Mk1.

**Many, many mods*

3

IT'S REAR-DRIVE AND GRIPS HARD

The production Continental is all-wheel drive but the racer is strictly rear-driven. Yet, in the dry at least, its limits feel almost unassailably high. That's the main takeaway from our brief taste of the GT3 at Silverstone: its drivers must display serious commitment, working a bee's-wing-fine line between big-grip cornering speeds and a big (and spectacular) mistake.

4

IT STOPS, FULL STOP

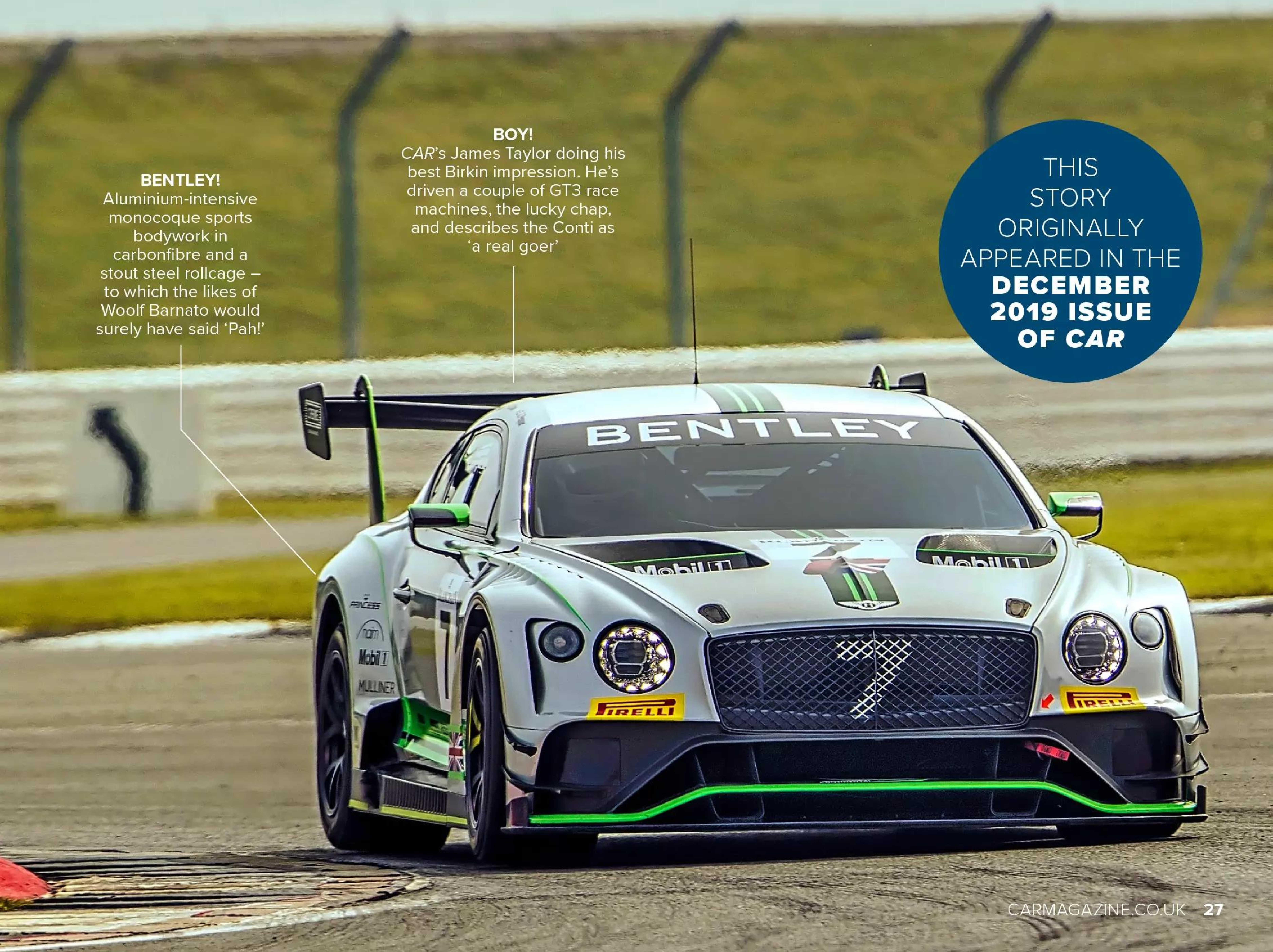
They say it's not the fall that kills you but the sudden stop at the end. The Continental's as quick as you'd expect a GT3 racer to be, but the real shock is the way it stops. Hit the pedal with intent for the first time, with one of Silverstone's trickier corners on its way to meet you with equal intent, and the Bentley pulls up like its rear wing's snagged an anchor chain. You didn't even trigger the ABS; try harder next time.

5

GETTING IT OFF THE LINE IS SMOKY

Hand clutch in, briefly stab the throttle to 100 per cent to automatically trigger a thrilling *whub-whub-whub* idle as the powertrain girds its loins, then re-apply full throttle and drop the clutch, letting the (cold-ish, in this case) rear tyres frenziedly bonfire themselves until the car runs into the pit limiter or the traction control steps in, whichever comes first. Good times.

JAMES TAYLOR



BENTLEY!
Aluminium-intensive monocoque sports bodywork in carbonfibre and a stout steel rollcage – to which the likes of Woolf Barnato would surely have said 'Pah!'

BOY!
CAR's James Taylor doing his best Birkin impression. He's driven a couple of GT3 race machines, the lucky chap, and describes the Conti as 'a real goer'

THIS STORY ORIGINALLY APPEARED IN THE **DECEMBER 2019 ISSUE OF *CAR***

W12

ASTON MARTIN
AC54 DBS

Dirty dozens

Downsizing? Hybridisation? No thanks! In 12-cylinder flagships from Bentley and Aston Martin, we bring the noise to the Alps

Words Ben Barry **Photography** Alex Tapley

Cool, quiet mountain air being processed into motive power – and, er, some CO2

The Gotthard Tunnel is the most direct route between Airolo in the far south of Switzerland and Göschenen, 13 miles north. It's way below our feet as we watch evening traffic stream towards its southern entrance on the floor of the valley, its walls sheer mountainsides. We could hop in the Bentley Continental GT Convertible and Aston DBS Superleggera Volante, bound downhill, then sit in a straight line on the A2 north. In the dark. With lorries and fumes. The sat-nav thinks we should.

Pah! One hundred years ago, when Bentley was newly established and Aston only six years old, there was no tunnel, only the Gotthard Pass, carved over the Alps by men with pick axes braving conditions that might've given Edmund Hillary a wobbly lip. Today it's the longer, more perilous option, but it's also a giant beanstalk of a road that stretches to the heavens and cool evening air above.

Given we're driving 12-cylinder convertibles built for grand touring *and* glancing back a century in the rear-view mirror, it feels appropriate to take the longer, older way back to tonight's hotel, to drive faster but arrive later and celebrate a brace of automobiles that stand as the very last of their kind.

Sat-navs off, roofs down, the Aston roars away in gunpowder crackles of exhaust flare and spikes of turbo boost, the Bentley a more dignified kind of very rapid progress with its torque curve like a stiff upper lip and stoic all-wheel drive.

It's a reminder that for all their conceptual similarities, what we have here are two quite different takes on the convertible GT. Yes, the DBS and Continental are produced by two of the most storied of British luxury marques, both cosset and pamper with their exquisite leatherwork and thickly insulated fabric roofs, and both are over-specified with 12-cylinder twin-turbo engines that turn zero into 62mph in a whisker over 3.5 seconds and blow past 200mph. But in philosophy as well as execution? Definitely different. Two days exploring Switzerland will crystallise their strengths and weaknesses.

The Aston DBS Superleggera Volante is marginally the newer of the two, and represents the flagship of Aston's series-production range. Based on the V12 DB11 AMR, it cherry-picks three iconic names from Aston's past: the DBS initials returned for the V12 coupe last year after an eight-year sabbatical, and you'll know Volante is a posh way of saying you can remove the roof. Superleggera is a reference to Italian coachbuilder Carrozzeria Touring Superleggera and its lightweight tubular spaceframe/aluminium body construction, and recalls a collaboration that began on the DB4.

The DBS isn't particularly *leggera* at around 1890kg, but there is an all-new carbonfibre body, with a gobbier look and swept-back headlights like a DB11 on a rollercoaster, as well as up to 177kg of downforce – just 3kg less than the coupe. Aston's given its 5.2-litre V12 a vigorous working over to yield a total of 715bhp and 663lb ft, some 85bhp and 110lb ft more than a DB11 AMR, then toughened up the transmission with a carbonfibre prop and thrown in the hand grenade of a shorter final drive to lower the overall gearing.

The first time you accelerate hard you'll probably depress the throttle three quarters of its travel and reflexively back off in awe – all the Aston's weight, the drag as it cuts through the air, the friction bound up in its rotating masses, all of it is apparently cast aside in one torque-laden, giddy seam of acceleration. Exposure does little to lessen the impact of this car's any-gear, any-speed urge – 50 to ▶

Bentley's revolving dash looked like a novelty – in fact it's genius

With every corner that bloody Aston gets closer and closer…

Sat-nav off, roof down, the Aston roars away in gunpowder crackles of exhaust flare

Twin-turbo 12-pot 1, mechanical grip 0

Bentley roof takes an age to fold. Worth it, though, in landscapes such as this

> **The V12's cultured violence is paired with a revised Matt Becker Who Used To Work At Lotus™ chassis**

100mph in fourth is gone in 4.2 seconds! Thankfully, there are decent odds on mortals containing this cultured violence courtesy of a significantly revised Matt Becker Who Used To Work At Lotus™ chassis: 5mm lower than DB11 with extra camber front and rear, retuned steering and brake-based torque vectoring, plus larger 21-inch wheels with 10mm wider tyres. Carbon-ceramic brakes are standard, too. Cost you, though: £247,500 before options.

All of which makes our £175k Bentley the value proposition of this twin test. It's the convertible version of the third-generation Continental GT, produces 626bhp and 664lb ft from its twin-turbocharged W12, and wears a smart aluminium body that can only apologise profusely that it still weighs 2414kg, even if it is an impressive 80kg lighter than its predecessor, and its body five per cent stiffer.

So the Bentley's less powerful, much heavier too, yes, but it's also a more opulent kind of GT, with a more formal design given definition by super-formed aluminium panels with crisp creases like a perfectly ironed shirt, and the jewel-like detailing of its headlamps, a grille like stately-home gates and our car's optional 22-inch alloys.

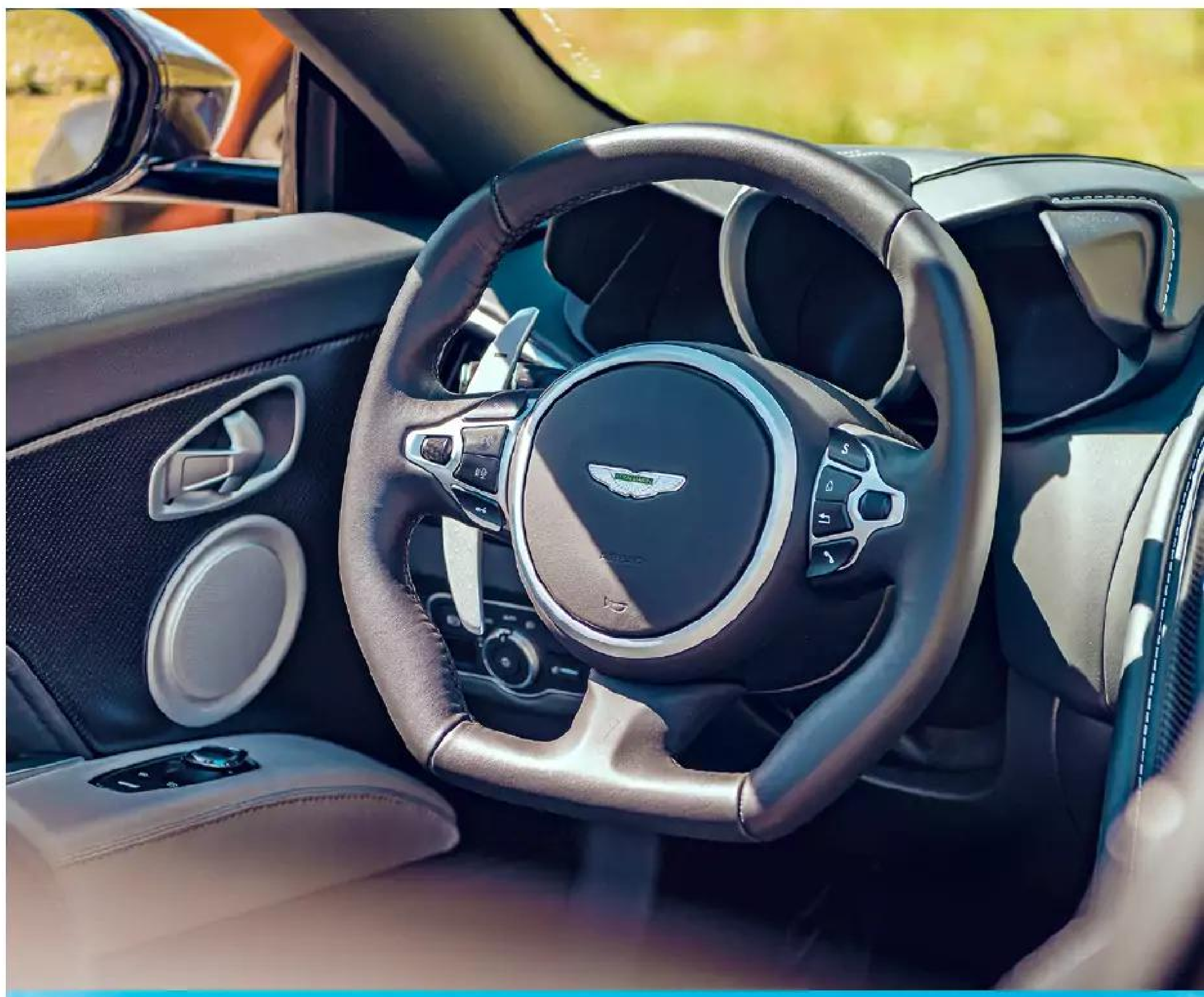
The aesthetic sophistication is complemented by engineering that puts an emphasis on comfort and luxury first, but doesn't overlook dynamics; air springs with 60 per cent more air volume than the previous model, a 48-volt anti-roll system that removes the compromise of rigid anti-roll bars, active all-wheel drive that can apparently recognise a good driver and give them more freedom to play (and vice versa), and huge 10-piston front brakes with 420mm discs.

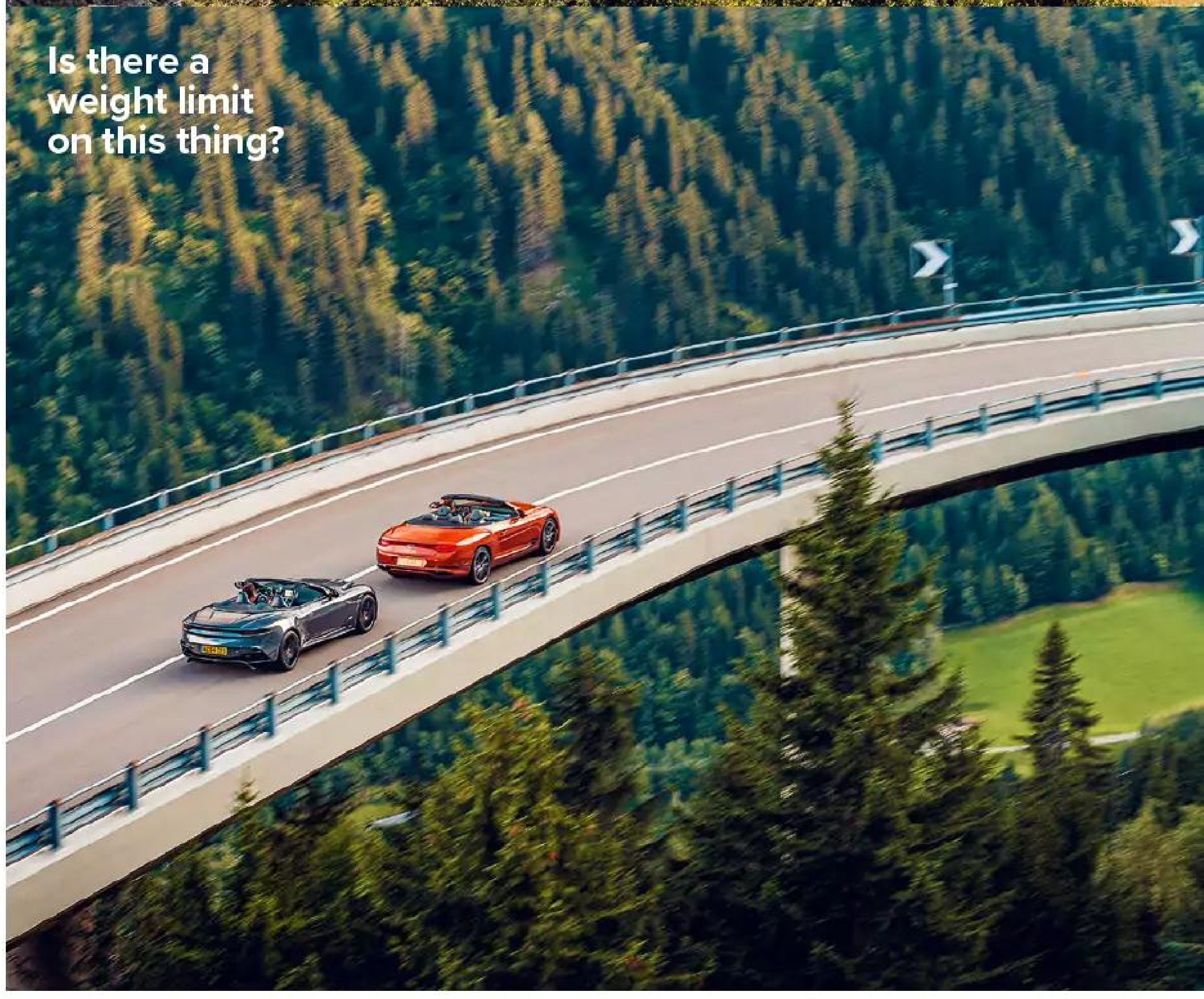
Press the starter and the Bentley's 6.0-litre W12 engine politely clears its throat, press a button and the Z-fold roof, with its new mechanism, insulation and sealing, disappears over your head silently at speeds up to 30mph – and a little indulgently at 19 seconds – like an Egyptian attendant dragging a palm frond back through humid air, before packaging flushly behind the rear seats.

Then the Bentley eases you into its embrace with its fine hides and plush comfort, overcoming any trepidation about its price and performance almost as soon as you select Drive. As we pick our way back to the hotel, daylight falling fast, Ben Miller's up front in the Bentley with the quilted massage seats cat-pawing at his back, neck warmers at full blast, heated steering wheel and armrests set to toasty, *CAR*'s ed instantly comfortable and confident to open the taps.

I'd picked up the Aston earlier in Zurich, and swooned over its Coke-bottle waist and rakish proportions, nestled down into sports seats set aggressively low in a cocooning cabin and marvelled at how its Z-fold fabric hood had whirred so quickly over my head and stowed so neatly. Just 14 seconds to fold away, trumpets Aston. A class-leading stack height of 260mm! The latter isn't trivial: packing the roof in the tiniest space gives the engineers daymares, but it preserves the elegant hindquarters of the DBS Superleggera coupe. The downside is a savaged boot. You want to put actual people in those rear seats? Need a boot? Buy the Bentley.

There'd been intimidation to those first urban miles in the Aston: its V12 had erupted with a phlegmy bark, and it felt large, wide and low as I dodged the kerbs and tram tracks of Zurich. But its easy gait and encouraging control weights softened the nerves: the feelsome, responsive twirl of the steering, the smooth auto gearshifts, the gentle take-up of the brakes, and more than anything the supple ▶





Is there a weight limit on this thing?

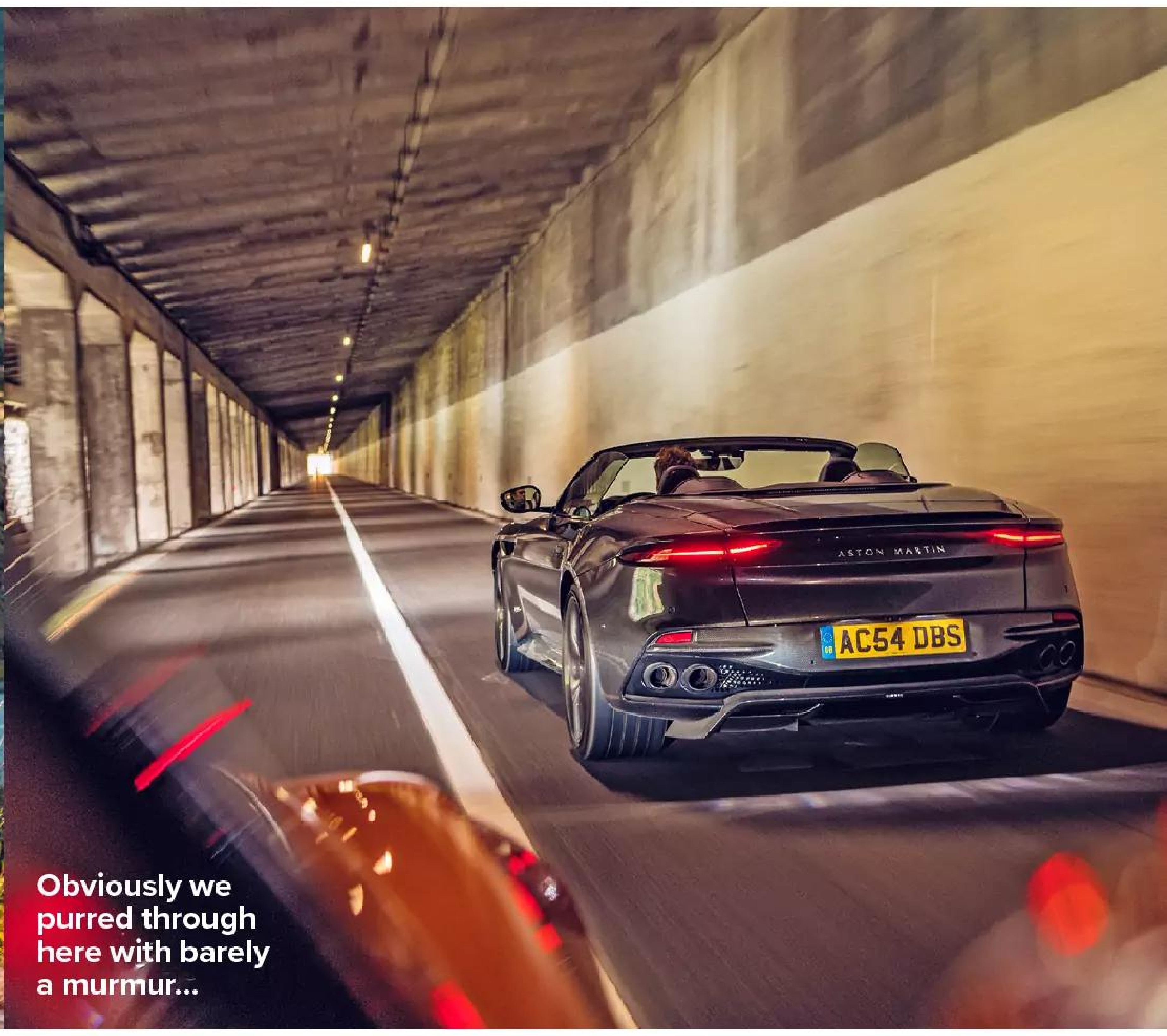
We head down the original Gotthard Pass, its cobbled surface built up and out of the landscape like fortress walls

Droptops are heavier, wobblier, pricier. But also magic

ARASCHA BERTHER RUERAS
SERRARIA

Jump from the Aston to the Conti and you'd never guess the Bentley was the less expensive car

Four-wheel drive, but happily the rear tyres can be given a hard time


ASTON MARTIN
AC54 DBS

Obviously we purred through here with barely a murmur...

ride, which had lulled soothingly on the journey south towards Andermatt. But was it better than the DB11 AMR? Not so sure.

Now, chasing the Bentley along the Oberalp Pass towards our overnight in Rueras, the DBS's size is melting away and, with the benefit of space, the true separation to its milder-mannered sibling becomes apparent. The more resolute bite of its front end is tangible. Load it up and it'll still feel pure and unflustered, even with what should feel like a wobblier structure but somehow does not. The Aston encourages you to carry more speed to the apex, so you do just that, buoyed by confidence not only in the front axle but also the car's carbon-ceramic brakes – the middle pedal is unfailing; push it harder and you always – always – get stronger deceleration.

With the DBS, though, more than anything it's the extra performance. You need 3000rpm before the turbos are fully lit, but the explosive energy that's subsequently released, and the bassy, relentless richness of its delivery through to 6500rpm, never fails to feel anything other than runaway rapid. Combine that with these tighter corners and you need to be on your game: the DBS can understeer a little when the boost's still swinging a leg out of bed, only for the compressors to spool and kick out the tail while you gather speed in one frantic blur of wheel-twirling and thunderous noise.

Firming up the suspension helps. Comfort's just the ticket on autoroutes, but there's too much load swilling side-to-side through quick direction changes. Sport retains enough compliance to keep a flow, but the mass is locked down, moving in sync with your intentions, not a fraction behind. Feelsome steering puts you at the centre of the action too, with weight and precision. It constantly reassures – if you overstep the mark, you'll be able to add lock quickly.

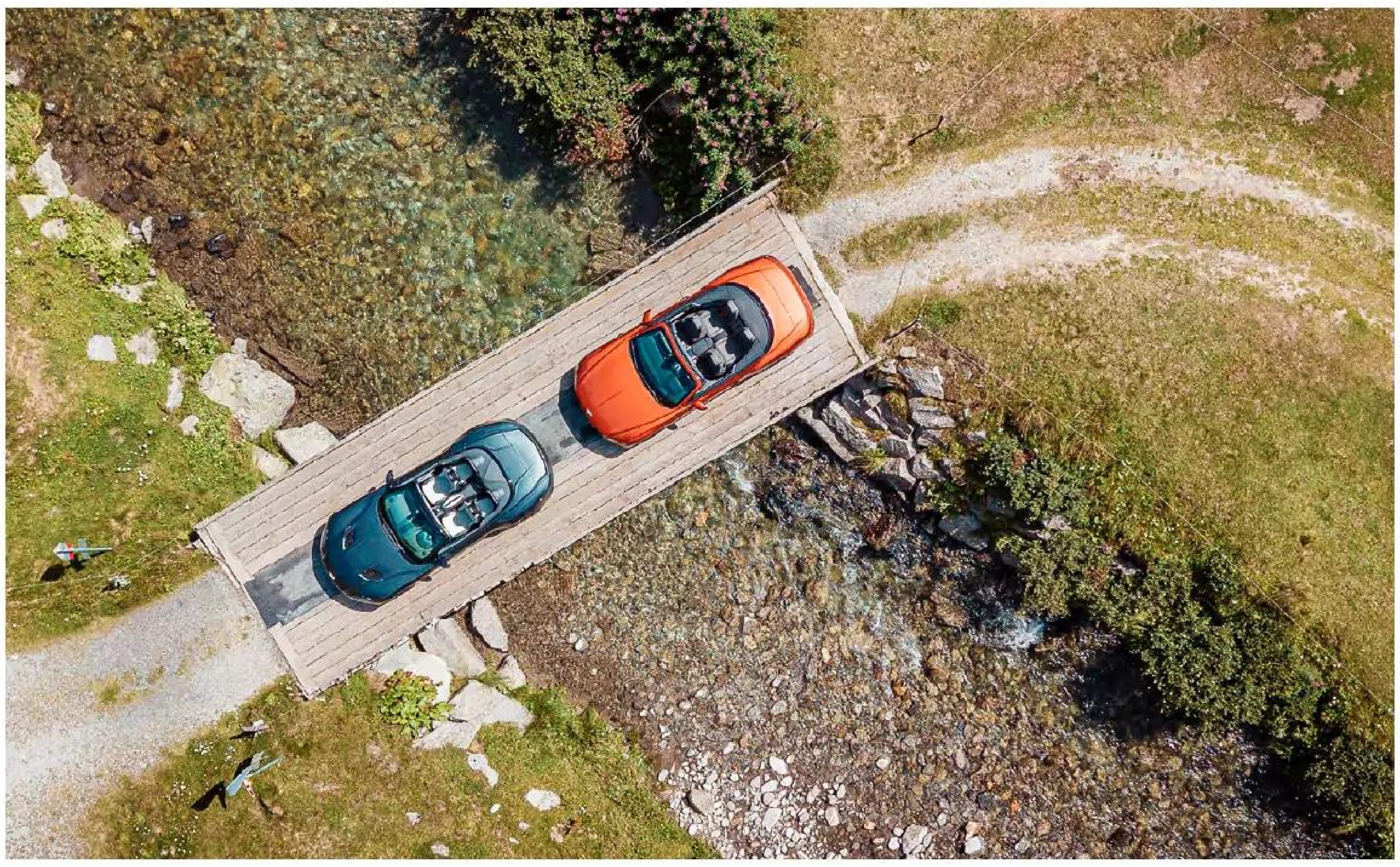
We surge effortlessly past the thinly spread traffic, engines and chassis stroked along at a comfortable seven-tenths, every braking zone calmly squashed, before the Bentley's brake lights burn red for the towns and the calm of our cabins fills with snatches of conversation, inviting smells from restaurants and cool evening air. Finally we're into Rueras, just before the kitchen shuts for the night.

Next morning, as we make our way back south past the Gotthard Pass, I switch into the Bentley. Let Joe Public jump from the Aston to the Continental GT and they'd surely never guess the Bentley was less expensive: the wing-like dash and centre console have such a solid, imposing feel you wonder if the entire interior isn't hollowed from a single tree trunk. The solidity's leavened here and there by beautifully wrought garnish: bezels like expensive watch mechanisms, indicator stalks to make a Faberge egg look dowdy, and a richness to the stitching and leather and a heft to the controls that speaks of relentless, fastidious quality – even the latches that tilt forward the front seats have tactile knurled backs. Details, details.

Technology is seamlessly integrated with traditional luxury, ▶

ASTON vs BENTLEY: TWO VERY BRITISH ICONS

	BENTLEY	ASTON MARTIN
1 Which OEM are you snuggled up with?	VW bought Bentley from Vickers in '98, bringing new broom to Crewe. VW still owns it, but Porsche has charge of Bentley, Audi and Lambo. No bad thing: Conti is based on the Panamera platform.	Aston has Italian and Kuwaiti investors, and Mercedes has a five per cent stake. Which helps explain the supply of AMG V8s in crates to Gaydon and the Merc-borrowed electronic architecture.
2 Who's bringing the beauty?	Stefan Sielaff since 2016, who believes 'the aesthetic has to be guided by pure elegance'. Current work suitably stately and confidently wrought – even the Bentayga is getting easier on the eye.	Marek Reichman, who's finally had the freedom to develop an all-new range of cars after years putting the same old models in new clothes and pushing them back out on the catwalk.
3 Business kicking ass?	Shifts 10,500 units per year but lost money on every car sold through 2018. Porsche and Piëch families issued ultimatum to be profitable within a couple of years at the start of 2019.	Not so much. Shifts 7000 cars annually, but £80m loss in first half of 2018, and slow sales in UK and Europe dropped share price below £5, leaving Aston worth a quarter of its value one year earlier.
4 Engines to die for?	The 6.0-litre W12 in our Conti and the anachronistic 6.75-litre in the Mulsanne are both Bentley's alone. The rest are VW: 4.0-litre V8 diesel and petrol, and V6 plug-in hybrid.	Merc's twin-turbo 4.0-litre V8 and Aston's own 5.2-litre twin-turbo V12. Rapide limps on with naturally-aspirated V12. Valkyrie gets Cosworth V12. New hybrid V6 in development.
5 Winning on track?	Six Le Mans wins are testament to Bentley's unstressed performance and durability. Which rather overshadows its more recent involvement in Intercontinental GT, Blancpain and British GT.	Aston won its class at Le Mans 2017, had a nightmare since, but gets its name all over Verstappen's, erm, Honda-powered Red Bull F1 car... Might supply engines if future regs suit.



The Continental's W12 woofles and whistles like it's having excitable dreams

including a digital instrument binnacle that won't frighten the digitally illiterate, and the optional revolving infotainment system, a kind of posh Toblerone that rotates from veneer to a trio of analogue dials to the full infotainment with an easy grace. It's the VW Group leveraging its strengths to great effect: enough independence for the Bentley craftsmanship and heritage to flourish; with access to group technology that a low-volume manufacturer couldn't hope to develop on its own.

The Bentley is an easier car to just jump into and drive than the Aston. You perch in a sports-command driving position on plush 20-way heated and cooled massage seats that favour comfort over ultimate support. There's just room for adults in the rear seats, and a larger boot. And you can bound into gravel laybys that fall away from the road and would blow the Aston's carbon splitter to smithereens. You can even raise the Bentley on its air suspension. In some ways the Conti feels more Range Rover alternative than Aston rival.

Drives more like a Range Rover too, with sleepier steering response at top-dead centre, more muted feedback, and an even more indulgent plushness to the ride quality. Metaphorically speaking, it's like a finger of whisky to knock the edge off reality, and a lovely way to cover far more miles, more easily, than you ever thought possible.

We head down the *really* old part of the original Gotthard Pass, with its cobbled surface and snaking hairpins built up and out of the landscape like fortress walls, before pushing further south. Here the silence, previously troubled only by water gushing down the hillsides and more cowbells than an '80s hair-metal anthem, is overwhelmed by our 24-cylinder symphony.

On some faster sections there are unexpectedly uncouth noises from the cars, too: diff whine and noise around the hood from the Aston, and some very pronounced wind noise around the Bentley's driver's side window – perhaps this car's an anomaly.

A little way past Bedretto, the road starts to thread steeply uphill, doing a fair impression of the pass that brought the *Italian Job* to its literal and metaphorical cliffhanger. There are hairpins, unforgiving rock faces and just a thin strip of armco between you and a drop to who knows where. I'm revelling in the Bentley's easy thrust, if unable to escape the charging Aston or the nagging feeling that this W12 remains a slightly curious engine. It's keener to haul from very low revs than the Aston, less interested in being wound right out, and delivers its performance in a linear surge, all of which fits the GT brief. But it's not particularly exciting or tuneful, instead going about its business making lots of woofles and whistles, like it's having excitable dreams during an afternoon doze in an armchair.

It also feels less explosively rapid than I remember versus its coupe sibling, no doubt because the convertible body adds an extra 170kg. But if anything, the refinement, the weight and the monotone delivery disguise just how rapid the Bentley actually is: it pushes you back into those sumptuous seats hard, and thumps down the road with abundant speed. It also makes a surprisingly good fist of covering a challenging road with a great deal of finesse. Yes, the Bentley does feel like a lot of car to get slowed and turned into a tight corner if you're driving quickly, and the gearbox can be surprisingly reluctant to serve second when you're braking in third, but the body control impresses given the masses at work and the inherently comfort-focused bent to the set-up. Impressive too that the 48-volt anti-roll system feels so natural given it's governed by a computer rather than responding with mechanical predictability.

The variable all-wheel drive and 22-inch tyres have traction to tear the road surface from beneath you, but there's also a satisfying rear bias when you accelerate hard from a corner, especially in the stability control's Dynamic setting. It sends just 59lb ft of torque to the front axle as it starts to oversteer – enough for you to sense the car really digging its heels in, sometimes enough to kick the rear end right out, which feels fantastically perverse in a car so grand, like barrelling down the stairs on a silver tray.

After two days on autoroutes, mountain passes and in town, the Bentley ultimately reveals itself as the car with the broader spread of talents. It's more spacious and comfortable as well as less stressful to use daily. It has the better-finished, more lavishly equipped interior, and it balances its fine craftsmanship with a level of technology the Aston can't match. It's also less expensive and a highly enjoyable drive, rewarding drivers of all abilities in all conditions.

The Aston claws its way back into contention with seductive design and its bewitching dynamics and powertrain. It is a sensationally tactile and involving machine to push hard over a great road, and still makes the long-distance stuff effortless, imperfect though it may be. There's no doubt the Bentley is the more complete car, and the more sensible buy. But it's the Aston you ache to drive again, and the car into which I'd put my (entirely) fictional funds. **car**

KIOSK
21 WO
AC54 DBS

BENTLEY CONTINENTAL GT CONVERTIBLE

PRICE £175,100 (£221,175 as tested)
POWERTRAIN 5950cc 48v twin-turbocharged W12, eight-speed automatic, all-wheel drive
PERFORMANCE 626bhp @ 6000rpm, 664lb ft @1350rpm, 3.8sec 0-62mph, 207mph
WEIGHT 2414kg
EFFICIENCY 19.1mpg, 336g/km CO2
★★★★★

ASTON MARTIN DBS SUPERLEGGERA VOLANTE

PRICE £247,500 (£280,990 as tested)
POWERTRAIN 5204cc 48v twin-turbocharged V12, eight-speed automatic, rear-wheel drive
PERFORMANCE 715bhp @ 6500rpm, 663lb ft @ 1800rpm, 3.6sec 0-62mph, 211mph
WEIGHT 1893kg (est)
EFFICIENCY 20.1mpg, 295g/km CO2
★★★★★

THIS DRIVE STORY ORIGINALLY APPEARED IN THE **DECEMBER 2019 ISSUE OF *CAR***

How to clone a monster

Bentley is building 12 ‘new’ Blowers. Only now, as they dismantle the priceless original, is the scale of the challenge becoming clear…

GET THE BOSS’S BUY-IN

Earlier this year, Bentley CEO Adrian Hallmark tasked Mulliner special projects man Glyn Davies with drawing up a list of Bentleys ripe for the ‘continuation’ treatment. Aston’s done it with the DB4 GT, Jaguar with the E-Type Lightweight – Bentley fancied a slice of the action. Top of Davies’ list was the Blower, though he warned the boss he wasn’t sure replicating the ’20s racer was even feasible. Naturally, Hallmark chose the Blower…

Cloning post-WW2 cars is one thing; delivering a dozen perfect reproductions of Bentley’s leviathan legend quite another. Not only is the original enormous, irreplaceable and unique (five were built, of which four raced, and this car, Tim Birkin’s, was much modified), it’s also the product of techniques (hand fabrication, tin bashing, ash framing) lost to mainstream car making long ago.

ASSEMBLE THE DREAM TEAM

The team formed to create the Blowers draws on expertise from within Bentley and beyond. ‘We’ve enlisted the help of several classic Bentley specialists,’ explains Davies. ‘They all have slightly different skill sets that together cover the whole car. There’s so much to source. You think about those headlamps, the work in those alone, and the fuel tank, which is incredibly complex.’ Working alongside them are technicians from Bentley’s Mulliner division and experts from engineering group Envisage.

TREAT DISASSEMBLY LIKE A DIG

The original is being pulled apart at Envisage in Coventry, the Blower surrounded by workbenches like stainless-steel tables in an operating theatre. Over the coming weeks, and for the first time in over half a century, it will be completely disassembled and every part scanned, bagged and catalogued with archaeological rigour. Then begins the process of working out how to make perfect copies of every element, be it the 4.4-litre supercharged four-cylinder engine or its fuel gauge (a fuel-stained wooden stick).

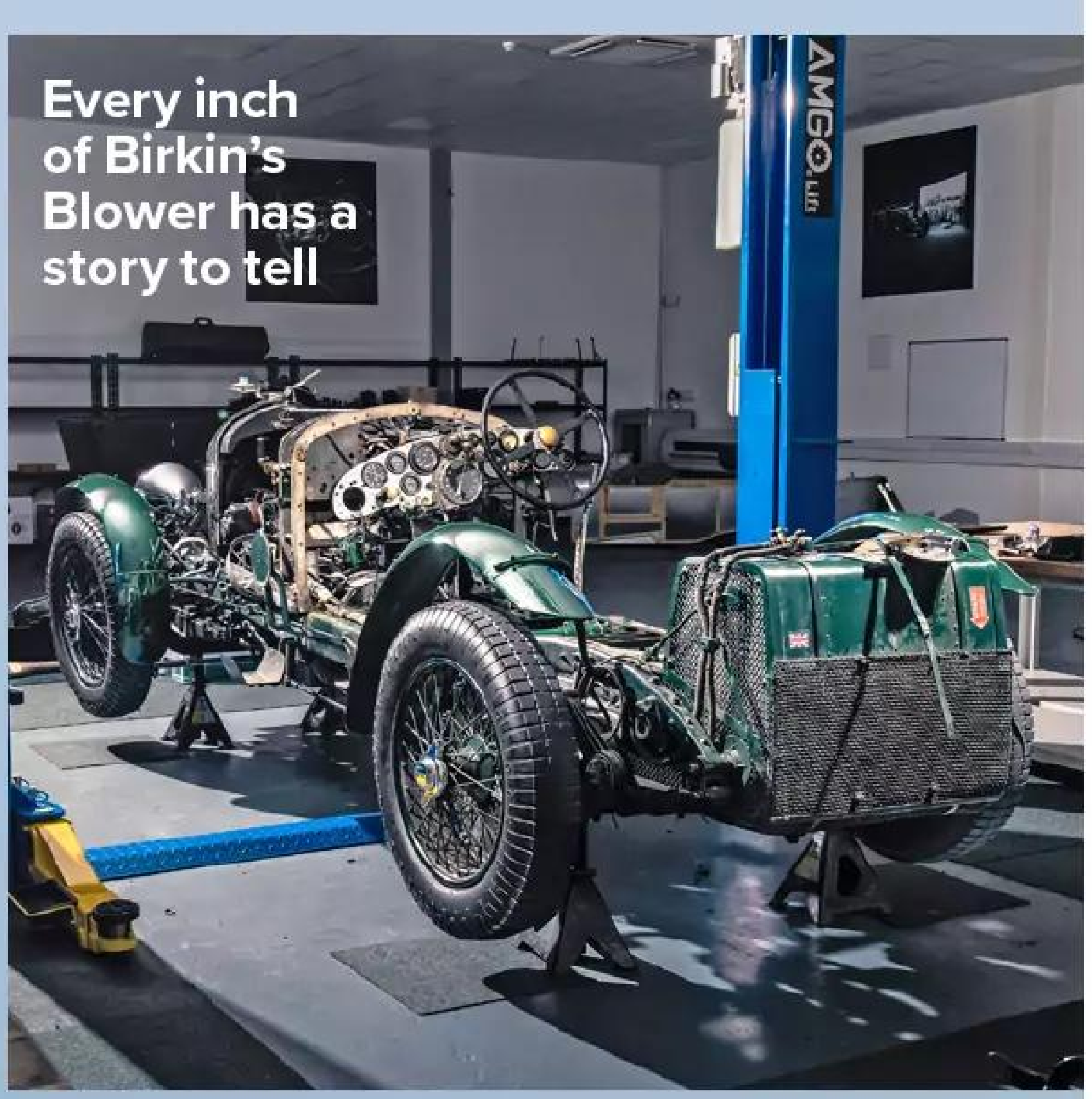
As we watch, the team removes the hood, the seats, the multi-part oak floor and the vast oil-spattered aluminium undertray. You’d be forgiven for thinking that, given the car’s size (wheelbase is over three metres, overall length nearly five), there’d be space to burn inside. But no. The underside of the oak floor is chiselled away to clear the top of the gearbox by millimetres, the recess ringed by holes to fit over the bolt heads in the transmission.

USE TODAY’S EXPERTISE WHERE YOU NEED IT

Specialists have been making reproduction engines for some time, and Bentley will embrace advances in metallurgy and design.

‘We built our first blower engine in ’96,’ explains Neil Davies of specialists NDR. ‘Over the years we’ve improved our patterns, so now we’re nigh-on identical to this engine.’ Mulliner’s Glyn Davies adds: ‘Adrian is keen that the engine goes through the same test beds

THIS STORY ORIGINALLY APPEARED IN THE **DECEMBER 2019 ISSUE OF *CAR***



Every inch of Birkin's Blower has a story to tell

we use up in Crewe to evaluate our modern engines. It's a nice touch, and it'll ensure all 12 cars have the same power curve.'

STAY TRUE TO THE OLD TECHNIQUES

'The Birkin car was privately funded, so already it was one step removed from Bentley, and everything from the chassis up was to Birkin's design,' says NDR's Neil Davies. 'There are lots of differences between this car and even the other cars made by the same people at the same time.' Mulliner's Glyn Davies says: 'We have drawings for most parts. Where there's been changes we'll scan those parts and reverse-engineer them.'

BE IN NO HURRY…

'The plan is to have a chassis ready in the first quarter of next year,' says Glyn Davies. 'We're looking at the first customer cars by the end of 2020. It's a big ask. The more you take off, the more daunting the project looks…'

BEN MILLER

The original's the product of techniques lost to mainstream car making long ago

Bentley's beating heart: the engines

There's never a dull moment with Bentley's wild motors

GREAT WAR, GREAT ENGINE

Before the First World War, WO Bentley developed a lightweight copper/aluminium alloy piston for racing. At the outbreak of war, he took his concept to the military and by 1917 the 150bhp Bentley Rotary 1 (right) was being produced at Humber's Coventry factory and was fitted to Sopwith Camels fighting Fokkers. By the end of the war, 5000 of the more powerful 230bhp BR2 had been made. WO considered it his greatest achievement.

Peacetime (but not exactly peaceful) achievements included the first 4.5-litre Bentley, Old Number One, immortalised as a participant in the crash at White House Corner, Le Mans 1927, having previously set the lap record. With four cylinders, four valves per cylinder and twin carburettors, it was a technically advanced, reliable 130bhp engine that won everywhere and powered nearly 700 road cars. It wasn't powerful enough for Birkin, though, who supercharged it – to WO's annoyance.

It was followed by a 6.5-litre overhead-cam, four-valve-per-cylinder, straight-six monster that made 180bhp in Speed Six form. It crushed the field at Le Mans in 1929.

The L Series 6.2 V8 went into production in the 1959 S2, and survives in today's Mulsanne. It's gained nearly 400bhp, but the pushrods and aluminium block remain.

SPOILS OF WAR

Rolls-Royce turned its new plant at Crewe over to aero engine manufacture in 1938; 15,000 Merlin engines were made for the war effort. Bentley's 3.0-litre straight-six and the Merlin share lineage from the valvetrain WO and Rolls-Royce 'developed' from a 1914 Mercedes Grand Prix car impounded in London at the outbreak of WW1.

MULTI-NATIONAL MASTERPIECE

Conceived in Germany, with two narrow-angle V6s and a shared crankshaft, the W12 was more compact than a V12. In 2014 the W12 (left) was passed to Crewe, where today's excellent 600bhp-plus version was developed.

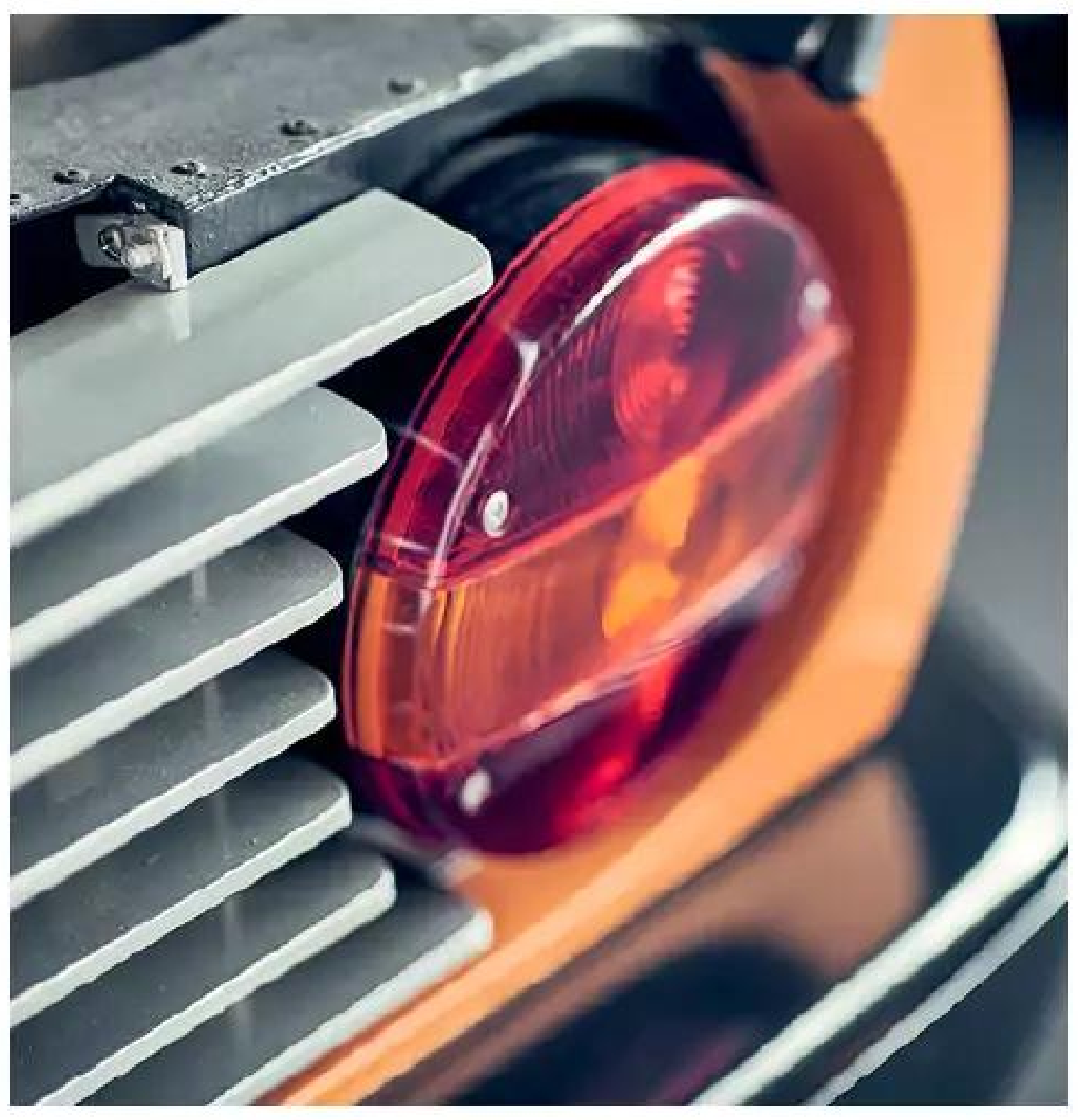
STEVE MOODY

S AN 63H

HAVEN'T WE BEEN HERE BEFORE?

The AMG One hybrid hypercar project is innovative, ambitious and forever close to being canned. Sound familiar? We drive Mercedes' first troublesome foray into mid-engined exotica, the stunning rotary C111

Words Peter Robinson **Photography** Steffen Jahn



Spot who's missing from this list of the founding fathers of the supercar: Lamborghini, Porsche, Ferrari, De Tomaso, even Ford. And spot the manufacturer conspicuously absent from this list of breathtakingly good-looking cars of the same period: most of the above, plus Jaguar, Citroën, Maserati, Aston Martin… But, in both cases, no Mercedes. Yet it could all have been so different if Stuttgart had gone ahead with the astonishing car you see here, the C111.

Officially it was always an experimental car; a rolling test bed for new materials, new shapes and new components. But you don't need to peer too closely to see the potential for recapturing the spirit of the gullwing-doored SL of the '50s with a powerful, clever and visually stunning coupe that could have been both a roadgoing supercar and the basis of a Le Mans racer. It could also have bridged the gap between the 300 SLR racer of the '50s and the later CLK and CLR competition cars, and on to today's One hypercar.

IT WAS TO BE A MODERN MID-ENGINED SUPERCAR TO RIVAL SANT'AGATA'S MIURA

The C111 was introduced at the 1969 Frankfurt motor show as an 'experimental sports car' to test various engineering ideas, most notably a radical Wankel engine for which Mercedes had a development licence, but much more besides: a new multi-link rear suspension (eventually to replace Mercedes' normal semi-trailing arm system) and front suspension; the mid-engine layout; an anti-lock brake system; and a tube-style frame welded of sheet steel, rather than the backbone-style construction then in favour. It's a layout that's essentially similar to the Ford GT40, which had just completed its fourth consecutive Le Mans victory.

Mercedes had played with a mid-engine supercar in the mid '60s, but Bruno Sacco, soon to be head of design, criticised the awkward Paul Bracq design. Instead, with the approval of his boss, Karl Wilfert, Sacco initiated a new and very wedgy shape. With its fibreglass-reinforced plastic body styled by Joseph Galitzendorfer, the C111 proposal took Mercedes design in a highly creative direction. Clean, elegant and aerodynamically efficient (with a drag coefficient of 0.33), the wildly expressionist styling – still beautiful and timeless – is surely proof that there was a considerable body of opinion within Mercedes that this car should be far more than a test laboratory. It was to be a modern 300 SL, a mid-engined gullwing supercar to rival the Lamborghini Miura in performance and appearance, and to combine these qualities with superior practicality and handling.

At 4440mm long, 1825mm wide and just 1120mm high, the Merc was also small – about the size of today's Porsche 911, but with shorter overhangs. Rudi Uhlenhaut, Mercedes' great test development engineer, undoubtedly set out to build the world's best sports car.

Customers and the press were impressed with the original 276bhp three-rotor car, but it was the 1970 version, with a 345bhp four-rotor engine, that brought a massive performance increase – the top speed climbed to 186mph while the 0-62mph time dropped to 4.8sec; brilliant numbers for the era. Combined with a lower waistline and larger windows, buttresses that sweep back from the reinforced roof, and gullwing doors that open to improve visibility, it had around 500 people queuing to order the car. But the numbers didn't add up.

An initial run of 50 cars was hinted at. Eventually, in 1973, durability and thirst issues with the rotary engine, crash-test security with the gullwing doors, difficulty with taller drivers getting in and out, and potential emissions problems, saw the Mercedes board veto a production version, by a margin of just one vote. It was tried with diesel engines – imagine that, a diesel supercar in the early '70s! – but that was not enough to get it the green light.

Now, rain falling, I'm about to be trusted with the gorgeous C111 in Stuttgart's dense traffic. I'll be driving it in the Swabian Alps and at a Mercedes test track, too. My minders from the Mercedes-Benz Classic division insist that I should not hold back. Drive it like a modern car, they tell me.

This car started life as a 1970 C111/II, with the four-rotor Wankel engine, but was later fitted with a petrol V8 from the period. Compared with today's supercars – with vents, ducts, wings, spoilers and splitters on every surface – the overall impression is precise, minimalist even, almost delicate. Only the high-profile (215/70 VR15) Michelin tyres and pop-up headlights betray its age.

Matthias Chwal, the mechanic who rebuilt the car when M-B Classic decided they wanted a reliable and fully functional roadgoing C111, opens the wide gullwing door for me, and warns me to watch my head on its lower edge. Once committed, you then have to slide across the expansive body sill, being careful to avoid the greasy door lock, and you find a perfect driving position. Long before the BMW M1 and Honda NSX, Mercedes created a user-friendly supercar. It is so much more practical than the Italian supercars of the era.

The huge four-spoke black steering wheel is straight from the S-Class, pedals offset just a little to the left relative to the wheel. The dashboard, wheel, switchgear and controls are from production 1970 Mercedes cars, the fashionable houndstooth cloth buckets supportive and comfortable. The huge windshield is striking, providing exceptional forward visibility. The windscreen's leading edge reveals the telltale sign of one of the world's first integrated radio antennas.

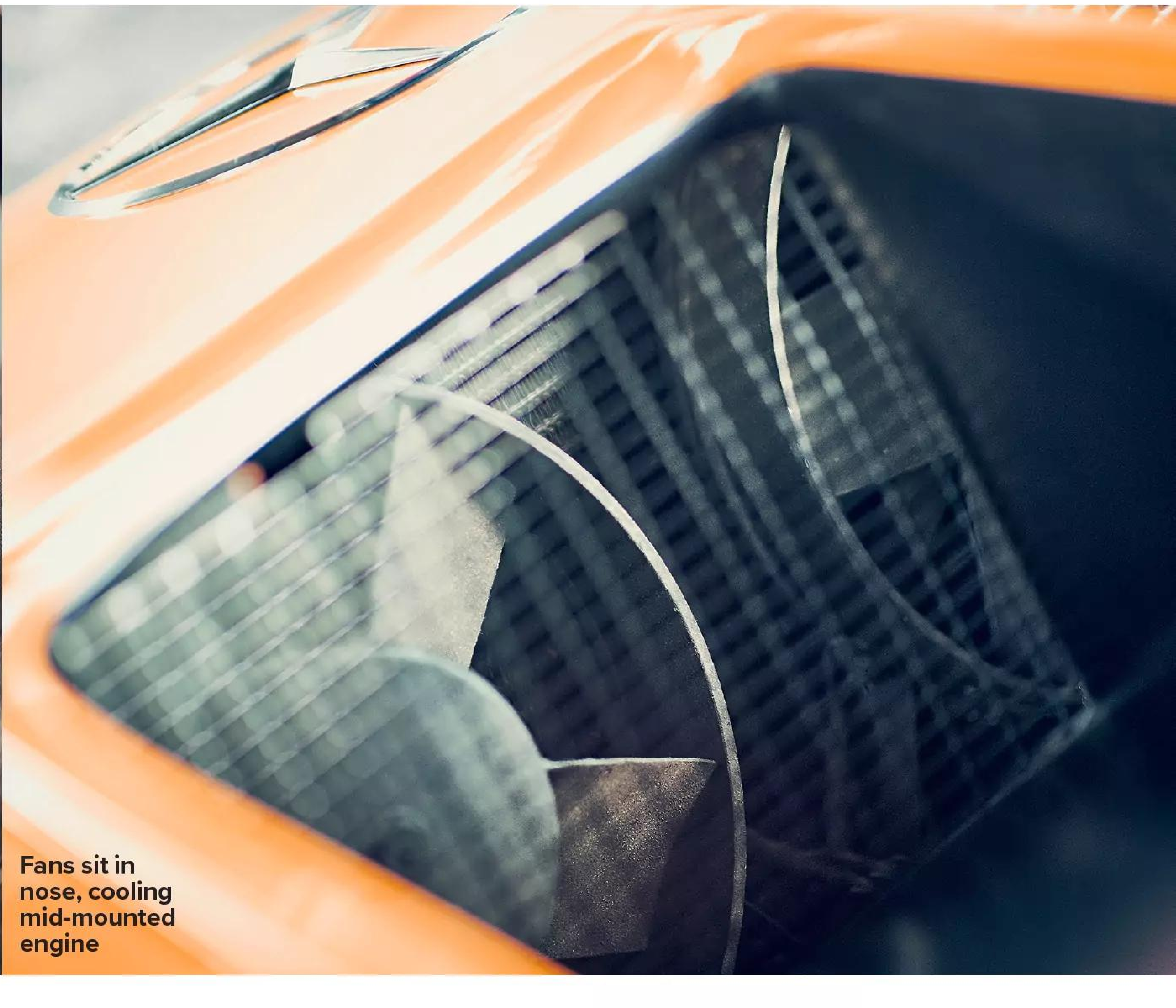
The period V8 now installed to keep the car realistic was developed for the R107 350 SL. This once experimental prototype is kitted out as if ready to go into production, with a working historic and vertically installed Becker radio, air-conditioning and full set of gauges. Even the inside of the glovebox is finished, in leather.

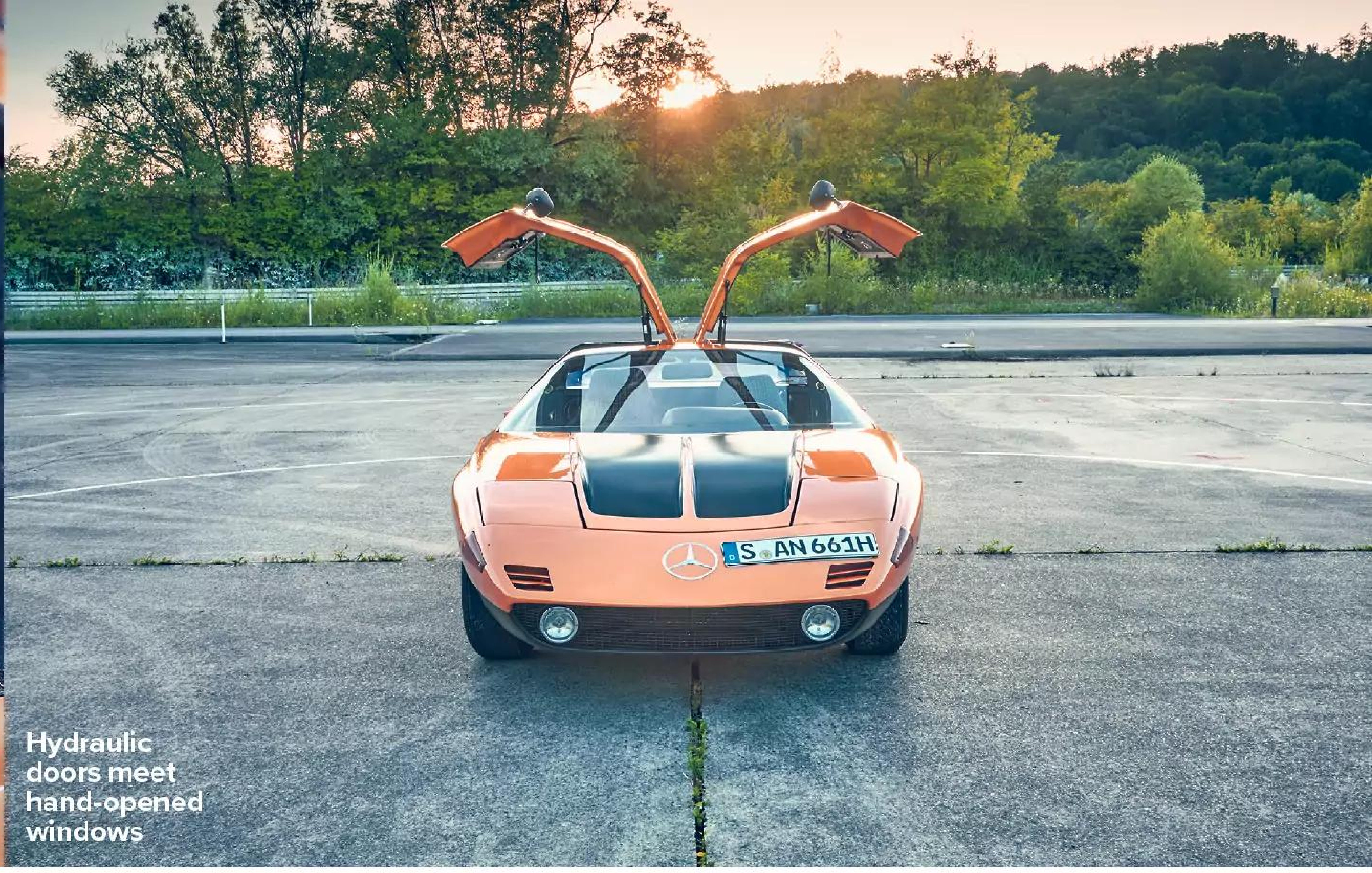
There's a note on the dash suggesting a 75mph top speed. After all, this C111 does spend most of its time in a museum, However, ▶

C111 comes alive as speeds rise, teasing with its stillborn glory

THIS STORY ORIGINALLY APPEARED IN THE **SEPTEMBER 2020 ISSUE OF *CAR***

Crazy times, the '70s


Fans sit in nose, cooling mid-mounted engine



Hydraulic doors meet hand-opened windows

IT FEELS UTTERLY SELF-ASSURED AND STABLE, WITH A HARMONY UNHEARD OF IN ITS CONTEMPORARY RIVALS

Merc lost faith in Wankel

despite the car's value, I'm told to ignore the note. Turning the key and hearing that V8 fire is bliss. It's lumpy initially, but settles to an even rumble. The crudely painted redline is at 6500rpm, though the numbers run to 10,000rpm, an indication it was intended for the Wankel rotary engine, which was governed to cut the fuel supply at 7500rpm.

To take off, you push a button on top of the gearlever to select the dogleg first gear (or reverse) on the ZF five-speed transaxle (as used in the DeLorean DMC-12). From second to fifth, the shift is via a standard H-pattern.

By modern standards, the C111 is brisk rather than fast, and needs plenty of revs to overcome a lack of low-end torque. Best to keep the eight in the 3500-5000rpm range, which means frequent use of the gearbox; you soon learn to deliberately hesitate for a brief but necessary moment as you change gears.

In four-rotor form, back in 1970, the C111 must have felt ridiculously fast. Yet the ride is beautifully composed and the new suspension's anti-dive geometry, which would make it on to all production Mercedes cars, really works, though there is bodyroll in tight corners. The brakes, the same vented four-wheel discs developed for the heavyweight 300 SEL 6.3, are strong, progressive and reasonably weighted.

The one area where the C111 fails by contemporary standards is in its steering behaviour. At anything below about 25mph, the steering is so heavy it demands strong-arm tactics and still feels ponderous. At parking speeds it requires a massive effort to move the front wheels. The trait of quickly loading up as you turn the car into corners exaggerates the understeer because slow corners demand far more lock than you initially feel is needed. And because there is nothing in the way of self-centring, the wheel must then be wound back to a straight-ahead position as you exit.

Two things here. First, it would have been easy for Mercedes to fit a production C111 with hydraulic power steering. Second, at 3.75 turns, the steering is far slower and less direct than modern cars. For the mid-engined supercar, Mercedes stayed true to its experience and fitted a traditional recirculating-ball system. No pin-sharp rack-and-pinion system, then beginning to appear on most of its rivals, for the C111.

The transformation in the steering on winding country roads is both welcome and a real surprise. As the steering lightens it also feels far more direct and accurate at the straight-ahead. It even develops self-centring out of corners, the whole car coming alive, encouraging the driver to attack corners and straights. Yes, you can drive this car hard; as hard as you dare. Now it is light on its feet and even feels agile.

Stretching the V8 out to 6000rpm, I can't believe my confidence levels – especially given its value – as I fling the Mercedes around, balancing its attitude on the throttle, the engine's power flooding the rear wheels that, nominally, carry 55 per cent of the car's weight. The whole car, so obviously thoroughly developed, displays all Mercedes' Fort Knox impregnability, its 1260kg feeling utterly self-assured and stable, with a sense of harmony and cohesion alien to its contemporary rivals.

From my enthralling day at the wheel, it's clear the C111 was created by engineers who knew how to drive and understood what it took to make a car decently fast and immensely rewarding to drive, at least away from suburban speeds. A production C111 would have elevated supercar standards to an all-time high.

No doubt there was great relief in Modena when the Italians learned that Mercedes didn't plan to produce C111s. At the time, Mercedes' 3.5-litre V8 was not sufficiently powerful, and the brutal 6.3/6.9 V8 was simply too heavy if the car was to maintain the balance achieved with the compact, punchy Wankel. As a result, through the troubled '70s with its energy crises, Mercedes ignored supercars and it wasn't until more than a decade later, with BMW on the march, that Stuttgart dared to think of genuine high-performance sports cars. In 1991 Mercedes showed the mid-engine C112, effectively its answer to Jaguar's XJ220, but the heavy-handed, almost ugly design was stillborn.

It would be another decade before Benz returned to the supercar with the front-engined Mercedes SLR McLaren, supposedly inspired by the 300 SLR Uhlenhaut coupe. That proved to be a disappointment, not driving as well as it might have given the talent involved in its creation, nor selling well. Then came the also gullwing SLS AMG and, in 2015, the AMG GT, each staking a claim to be the inheritor of Merc's high-performance heritage, though without either displaying the engineering and design creativity of the exquisite C111.

I can appreciate and accept the reasons why Mercedes-Benz didn't build the C111, but that doesn't make it any less disappointing. Not when it looks so close to perfection – a car that should be mentioned in the same breath as the Lamborghini Miura and De Tomaso Mangusta, and revered for its game-changing innovations, rather than mourned as something that might have been. **car**

MERCEDES C111/II (1970)

PRICE Valued at £5m+
POWERTRAIN Four-rotor Wankel, 600cc per rotor, five-speed manual, rear-wheel drive
PERFORMANCE 345bhp @ 7000rpm, 289lb ft @ 4000rpm, 4.8sec 0-62mph, 186mph
EFFICIENCY n/a mpg, n/a g/km CO2
WEIGHT 1260kg
ON SALE Never

MERC DOESN'T DO MID-ENGINED CARS (EXCEPT SOMETIMES)

Sauber C8/C9/C11
In the '80s, Merc was keen to stealthily ease its way into Group C sportscar racing. Sauber built the chassis and ran the cars, Merc did the engines, first in the C8. The C9 was prettier and faster, and became unbeatable for 1989. Tough, torquey 5.0-litre twin-turbo V8 was good for in excess of 800bhp.

CLK GTR/LM/CLR
The V12 mid-engined, carbon-bodied CLK GTR was created for GT1 racing. Merc got its hands on a McLaren F1 for benchmarking, and by late '97 was out-pacing the similarly V12 McLarens. The GTR became the CLK LM (V8-engined) and then the infamous somersaulting CLR.

AMG One
We're still waiting for the F1-engined hybrid hypercar. It was saved more than once, in utero, by AMG boss Tobias Moers' bloody-minded determination, so his move to Aston is a worry. Come on, AMG, our local bypass demands to be graced by a 1000bhp hybrid with handling by Hamilton.

THE FIRST DAYS OF DISCO

Die Hard was released. The Berlin Wall came down. And the first Discovery – the car Land Rover really didn't want you to buy – emerged from the West Midlands

Words Ben Oliver **Photography** Sam Chick

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Time has not yet been kind to the original Land Rover Discovery. For years you could buy the earliest examples of Land Rover's other models – Series 1s and three-door Range Rovers – for a few hundred quid. But recently they've become the Instagram-friendly classic wheels of choice for the new breed of hipster car enthusiast. They're both rugged and retro, and thus the perfect match for hipster beards and boots. Values have spiralled, not helped by the fact that for a while Land Rover itself was buying up the good ones and doing factory restorations costing well into six figures for the Range Rovers.

The Discovery has yet to be rediscovered, and that seems unfair. It is 30 years since the original went on sale in the UK, and it quickly became the Ford Mondeo of the British upper-middle classes. Few of us really needed the original Defender, and while most of us want a Range Rover, relatively few of us can afford a new one. The Discovery might not have the macho appeal of one or the glamour of the other, but back then it was the Land Rover that made the most sense for most people.

It reached its first million sales in just 23 years – five fewer than the original 'series' Land Rovers – and its popularity kept factories open and people employed in the West Midlands as its maker was being passed like an old fiver from Rover to BMW to Ford to Tata.

It's a historically important car, and the earliest examples are late Thatcher-era period pieces: quirky and revealing and maddening and brilliant to drive. Together, those qualities ought to make the Discovery a collectible, valuable classic. So for its big birthday I thought I'd take an early one up to Scotland to tell its story.

The early days of Disco show the British car industry of the time at its best and very worst. By the mid-'80s the Range Rover was proving an unexpected luxury hit, and was pushing upmarket with the introduction of the four-door body, an auto 'box, the Vogue trim and the start of sales in the US. At the same time the Isuzu Trooper and Mitsubishi Shogun were proving popular at a lower price. Land Rover needed something to take them on, and to plug the widening gap between the Defender (as it would later become) and the Range Rover. Project Jay began in '86, was approved for production in August '87 and the Discovery went on sale on time in the UK on 16 November 1989 at £15,750.

That's really fast for an entirely new model with strikingly different styling. But Rover did it with a blatant supermarket-sweep of its parts department. The new car used the Range Rover's 100-inch chassis, its doors and its glass. The front lamps were taken from a Sherpa and the rears from the Maestro van. It was launched – weirdly – as a three-door seven-seater with pressed steel wheels to differentiate it from the Range Rover, in the hope that it wouldn't cannibalise the more expensive car's sales. Imagine a manufacturer now making an important new car as unappealing as possible. Buyers had to wait until the following year for the five-door body, alloy wheels, and fuel injection for the V8. Depending on who you believe, the side graphics were there either because you'd never see such a thing on a Range Rover, or to distract from the terrible panel fit.

Our pristine white three-door Disco's oddball looks are explained by this conflicted genesis, and in turn perhaps explain why they're not yet being hoovered up by hipsters. Spen King, father of the ▶

Current car can follow wherever the original leads – and bring wi-fi

Fortunately for the Disco it wasn't all downhill from here

It's a historically important car, and the earliest examples are late Thatcher-era period pieces

Upright body gives interior space to burn. And the smell! Divine

Range Rover, said he spent 'less than a fraction of one per cent' of his time on the exterior design of that car, but real effort went into the first Discovery, with multiple full-size design studies being built. The final design should probably be considered a success, given that its 'Alpine' skylights, stepped roof and asymmetric rear have either been carried through to – or are hinted at – on the fifth-generation car.

The thin A-pillars give an almost uninterrupted, iPhone panorama- shot view of the Highlands

But still, the car I have here on the Blair Atholl estate just looks a bit awkward. Its commercial appearance is easily explained by its van lamps, steel wheels, short doors and long, bulbous aft. Following the old Disco off-road, its voluminous body threatens to topple over its 16-inch, 205-section tyres and you could mistake the whole rear end for a Maestro van, and not just the lamps. (Early Freelander mules were disguised as Maestro vans, but looked like shrunken Discos.)

And wow, body engineering has moved on in 30 years. Run your hand around the inside of the wheelarch and you'll feel the sharp edge of the sheet metal, simply folded back on itself. The rain-gutter above the side glass sits proud of the body like the guttering on your house. The window frame on the door is about the simplest piece of metalwork I've seen on a car: just a few lengths of straight steel profile welded together, around which you can easily close your fist.

And our expectations of the visual refinement of a pricey SUV have moved on too. The mechanism that folds the front seats forward looks like what it is: the oily, ugly, functional product of a swarfy West Midlands machine shop. There's no attempt to conceal it. The tiny wing mirrors have two ugly parts codes moulded into them, right in the driver's line of sight. And much of the switchgear would have been familiar to owners of other contemporary products of British Leyland and its aftermath.

The ashtrays in the door tell almost the entire story of the car. They rotate outwards and stop exactly where the lit tip of your cigarette would be if you had your hands at 10-to-two and it was 1989: back then, that was a convenience feature. And inside they bear the tiny, roughly-moulded logos of both BL and Rover.

But if you ignore the details and try to see the bigger picture, the cabin is a work of genius. Rover farmed out the interior design to the Conran Group. To some at the time, that decision was as much of a gimmick as the zip-out holdall (sadly missing from our car) that replaced a central storage box. But it's brilliant to look at, look out of, and use. The dashboard and door cards are graphically perfectly resolved. The spaghetti-thin A-pillars give you an almost uninterrupted, iPhone panorama-shot view of the Highlands. Sir Terence seems to have anticipated the ubiquity of the mobile phone with endless flat shelves covered in grippy stippled rubber. The map shelves and stowage nets in the roof helped establish the versatility on which the modern Discovery is now so heavily marketed, and the folding, side-facing rear seats are a work of genius: they are neatly, artfully integrated into the boot sides and unfurl with a single, simple, well-engineered action. I'd have mine with the holdall and in the pure '80s Sonar Blue.

Whatever its failings, the Discovery was a huge hit. A third shift had to be added at Solihull in '93, and by the time the first generation of the car was replaced in '98, over a third of a million had been made. The closely related Discovery 2 was ▶

J408 LTT
DISCOVERY
DN68 UCE

Period ashtray an ergonomic masterpiece

Spare wheel? Check. Spare Ben Oliver? Check

Disco 5 is an astonishing off-roader – better than it needs to be

> **You keep expecting to have to intervene, but the best approach is to let the car get on with it**

feeling its age when it was replaced in 2004, but its loyalists refused to believe that it could be improved upon so Land Rover had to build an extra 7000 before Geoff Upex's striking, modernist Discovery 3 could go into production. With its monocoque chassis, the influence of Jaguar's Mike Cross on its handling and a huge, rectilinear coffin of a boot still uncompromised by aero demands, that car and the Disco 4 might be the sweet spot in a 30-year history. Good ones hold their value well now.

I've brought my long-term-test Discovery 5 along to compare with the original. With its sleek, full forms, its wedgy stance and its 22-inch rims it looks like it has just arrived from outer space when parked next to the J-plate car. But the similarities don't take long to discern. It still has the stepped roof, the offset rear plate and a hint of the Alpine skylight. The body engineering is still terrible in places. Odd how a company can stay consistently iffy at something for 30 years. But there's more that's consistently right about both cars, from the cleverly stowed third row to the vast, versatile cabin. You might not like SUVs, but there's a reason they're so popular, and the Discovery has nailed the 'utility' part of the SUV equation from the outset.

And there's a consistency about the way they drive too. The old car's 200Tdi engine starts with a commercial blast but settles to an acceptable idle, and the manual 'box is worked with a relatively precise, short-throw action. Just 111bhp doesn't give it much urge on the road. But off-road, its 195lb ft is more than enough: on the car's press launch in '89 a 200Tdi (police-liveried, weirdly) pulled a 178-tonne train. Despite some unforgiving terrain – deep wades, rock climbs and off-piste excursions – old and new just keep buggering on with quiet Brummie doggedness.

You keep expecting to have to intervene, but the best approach in any Land Rover is just to let the car get on with it. It's better at this stuff than you. The early car does it with gears and my car with electronics, but the experience they draw on is the same.

The last Land Rover I drove over Blair Atholl was an early Series 1 from 1949, with a 1.6-litre engine and aluminium bodywork that barely reached my waist. Forty years and a roof separate that car and the original Discovery, but they feel more closely related than the '89 Disco and my car. The first Land Rover and the original Discovery are both simple, geary, mechanical devices in which you feel part of this extraordinary scenery, not insulated and isolated from it. That's no criticism of the Disco 5: it's just why we love old cars but mostly drive new ones.

The Series 1 and Disco 1 both feel important: they're significant, intelligent designs that altered the course of the car industry. The Discovery deserves rediscovery: or at least greater acknowledgement. Buy a three-door now, while a half-decent one is still five grand. **car**

THE LAST DAYS OF DISCO? THE DEFENDER THREAT

The new Defender might do to the Discovery what Land Rover feared the original Discovery might do to the Range Rover 30 years ago: steal the existing car's sales. But this time, the cannibalism might prove fatal.

The 'big' Disco is now easily LR's worst-selling vehicle, with 41,000 made in the last financial year, down 14 per cent on the previous year. The full-fat Range Rover came second-last but sold 40 per cent more.

The RR Sport sold twice as many as the Disco, and the Discovery Sport topped the chart with 88,000 shifted, even as it awaited its recent refresh.

This isn't entirely the current Disco 5's fault, although it hasn't been an unalloyed success with the critics, not least for its looks, and that offset rear number plate in particular. Its main problem is that it now competes with five siblings rather than two.

The original Disco made a better family car than the original Defender or Range Rover, but the Evoque, Velar and Disco Sport are now the better choice for many families: wieldier and with less emphasis on boulder-crawling ability.

Those who still buy the big Disco because they like a proper, voluminous off-roader are very likely to have their heads turned by the new Defender 110.

Unlike the '89 Discovery, the 2020 Defender isn't going to be cheaper than the car it threatens: in fact at £51,750 a Defender 110 will be four grand more than a Disco with the same 237bhp four-cylinder diesel and entry-level S trim.

But it won't need to be cheaper to win Disco buyers. It shares the Discovery's D7 chassis, air springs and boot space, so it will now at least match the Discovery where it once lagged on refinement and versatility. It is also a lot cooler.

So it's not unthinkable that as JLR restructures, the big Discovery could be killed off in a cost-cutting product rationalisation, particularly if sales continue to head south towards 30,000. The new Defender is likely to be the chief cause of that. Et tu, Brute?

Mud, no sweat, some gears

THIS STORY ORIGINALLY APPEARED IN THE **JANUARY 2020 ISSUE OF *CAR***

V44
COR
IAZ 4940

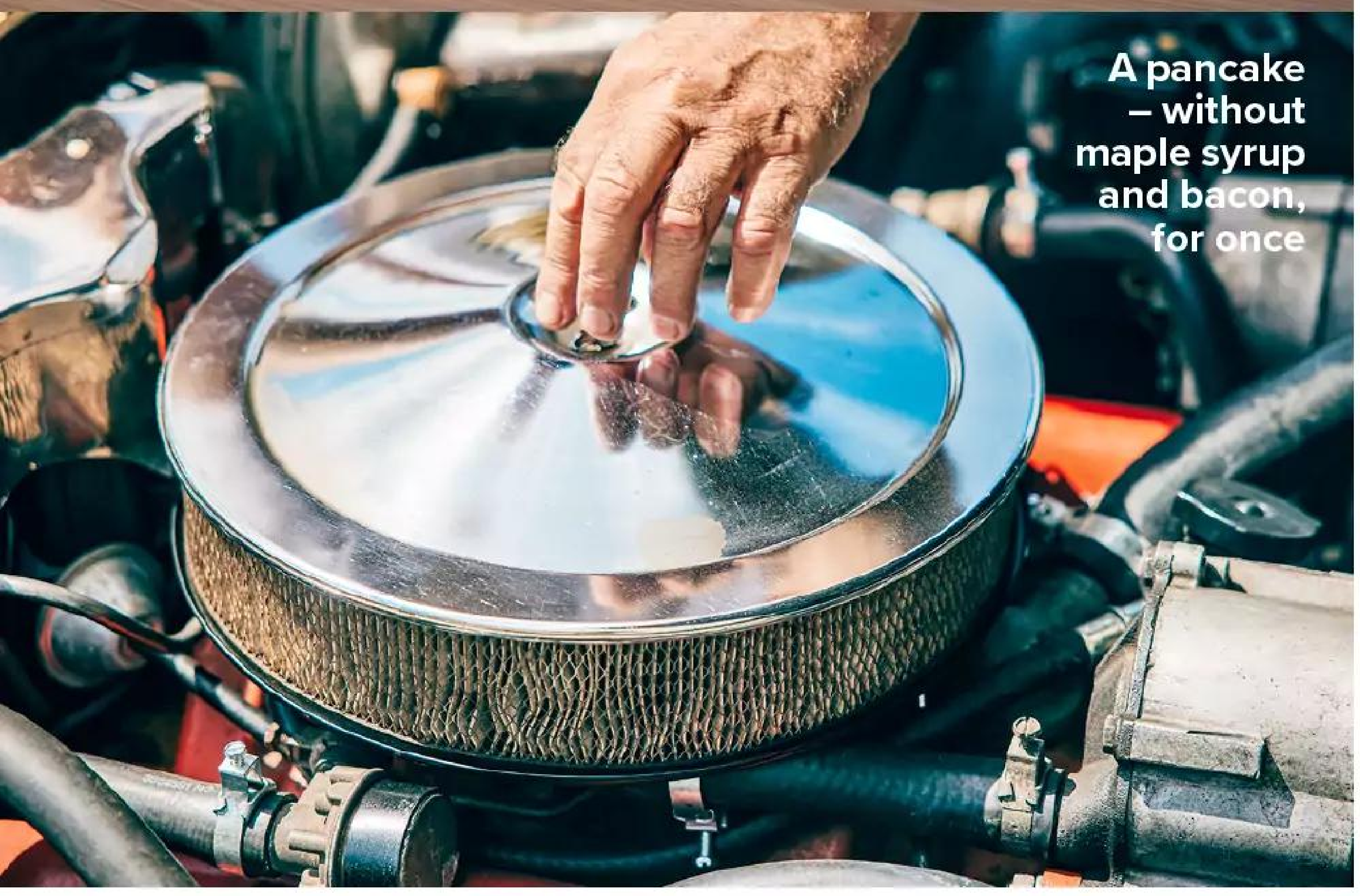
THE RIGHT STUFF

Corvette: the greatest American dynasty. But which is the best? We drive every generation – including the current mid-engined convertible

Words Chris Chilton **Photography** Sam Chick

Into the 21st century with the C5 (right) and fixed-light C6

Chris: comfortable with this mid-engined heresy


A pancake – without maple syrup and bacon, for once

Cars, like car magazines, come and go. Only a handful of names have the flexibility and cultural clout to weather changing tastes and regulatory obstacles. Even *CAR*'s 60-year run looks inconsequential next to the seven decades of service put down by America's favourite sports car, the plastic-fantastic Corvette.

The use of fibreglass as a body medium for the original C1 Corvette was a radical move for a big OEM like GM. But underneath the 1953 Motorama show car's Polo-white body with its micro tail fins, it was mostly parts-bin stuff to keep costs down, though the 235 cubic inch (3.9-litre) V8 moved backwards in the leaf-sprung, ladder-framed chassis to benefit weight distribution. It was also hopped-up to 150bhp thanks to mods that included a third carb and hotter cam.

That still made it less powerful than Jaguar's similarly-priced XK120, the only transmission available was a two-speed Powerglide auto and buyers had to contend with iffy panel fit and leaks. Sales were slow for the first two years and GM could have pulled the plug. Instead, it pulled out the barely-lit Blue Flame straight-six and dropped in Chevrolet's brand new 265-cube (4.3-litre) small-block V8 plus a three-speed manual in time to face-off with Ford's new also-two-seat Thunderbird.

The 0-60mph time fell from 11.0sec to 8.5 for '55 thanks to the 195bhp small-block, and to as little as 5.7 seconds in 1957, when the V8 was opened up to 283 cubic inches (4.7 litres) and optionally available with Ramjet mechanical fuel injection that claimed 283bhp – the mythical 1bhp per cubic inch. Bob West's '57, the C1 you see here, is packing dual carbs and slightly less heat. But its 245bhp punch still feels strong today. It was seriously rock 'n' roll for 1957.

As was the styling, which it inherited from the '56 car. Fins were out (ironic, given they were growing on every other Detroit car), contrast-colour coving was in, and the faired headlamps were replaced by more traditional vertical lights. Later cars doubled-up on the number of front lights and the chrome, but former drag racer West, who bought the C1 after a string of TVRs, reckons the '56-'57 look is the pinnacle of first-generation Corvettes.

We think he's right, and so does Peter Reeves, who owns both a C1 and the stunning C2 Sting Ray coupe he's brought along today. GM built a fastback prototype in 1953, but it was another 10 years and the launch of the second-gen Vette before a fixed-roof shell became a production reality, appearing in 1963 with exotic ▶

SCS 1
IAZ 4940

EVEN *CAR*'S 60-YEAR RUN LOOKS INCONSEQUENTIAL NEXT TO THE CORVETTE'S SEVEN DECADES OF SERVICE

CORVETTE
KND370N

Authentic big American horizons (just outside Bicester)

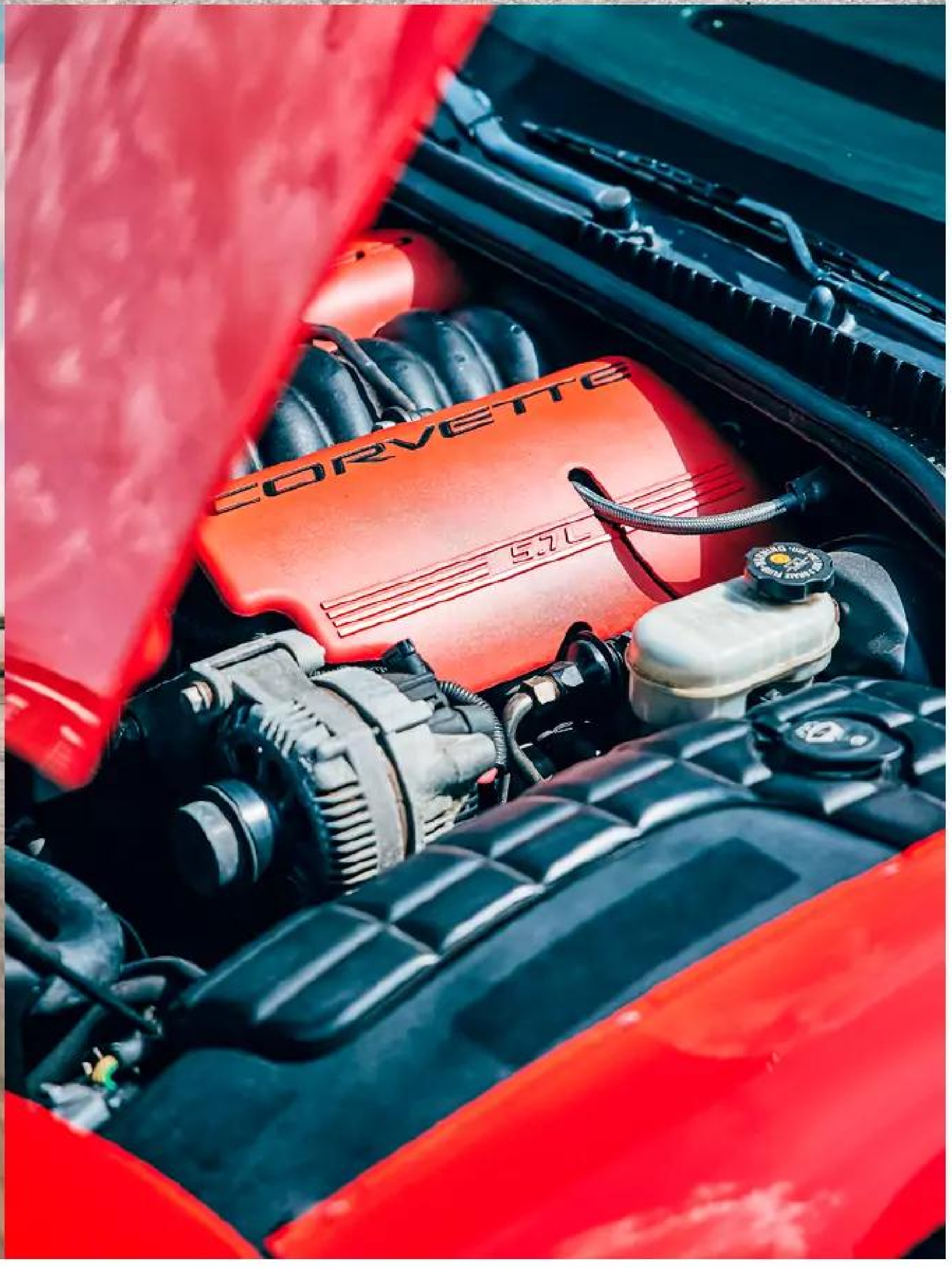
What a view. And what's an airbag?

Not just the best looking Corvette but the best looking car?

Radial T/A
BFGoodrich

4 RKW
IAZ 4940

Much has changed. Nothing's stayed the same



I FEEL SO DAMN ICY COOL IN THE C2, DAYDREAMING THAT I'M OFF TO COLLECT RAQUEL WELCH FOR A HOT DATE AT THE WHISKY A GO GO

pop-up headlights, independent rear suspension and a now-iconic split-rear-window design (dropped after the first year).

You could still buy a convertible Vette, but it's the hardtop, with its inverted boat-tail rear and door frames that cut deep into the roof, that's the definitive C2 shape – perhaps the definitive Corvette shape. It's hard to believe it's only two years younger (and, if you go by classic car polls, considered less beautiful) than Jaguar's E-Type.

It's impossible not to make the same comparison when you drop into the black 'bucket' seat that's really more of a one-man bench. An XKE, as the Jag was known in the US, isn't quite as cramped as Bob West's C1, whose giant steering wheel's worrying proximity to your belly acts like a BMI danger-zone early-warning device, but the roomy C2's cabin is far more comfortable than either. Think that double-arch dashboard and full suite of gauges looks cool in the pics? That's nothing to what it's like actually being here. I feel so damn icy cool, daydreaming that I'm off to collect Raquel Welch for a hot date at the Whisky a Go Go, I fear my legs might snap off at the knees when I try to get out.

Twist the big fake-wood wheel to take up the on-centre free play and the steering feels good mid-corner, even if the recirculating-ball set-up doesn't connect you like an E-Type's rack and pinion. And with around 360lb ft ready to be deployed by your right foot courtesy of a now-327 cubic-inch (5.4-litre) mill developing upwards of 300bhp, there's enough grunt that the still-only-two-speed auto isn't the disaster you're expecting. Think of it instead as like driving a single-speed EV while Detroit's own MC5 kick out the V8 jams.

By the time Reeves' '66 was built you could order big-block 427 cubic inch (7.0-litre) V8s with up to 425bhp and shouty side exhausts. But most went for a small-block convertible, and it wasn't until 1968 and the C3 Corvette (known as the Stingray from 1969) that coupe buyers finally outnumbered convertible shoppers. Previewed by the 1965 Mako Shark II concept car, the third-gen Vette carried over the C2's chassis and running gear, but finally subbed the old Powerglide with a three-speed Turbo Hydramatic auto and clothed the lot in a swoopy Italian-looking body with standard removable T-tops and huge peaked front wings that dominate the view from the driver's seat. A 15-year production run makes the C3 the most long-lived of all Corvettes, and coincided with seismic shifts in the automotive landscape that had huge ramifications for the way America's two-seat sweetheart looked and drove.

Performance peaked in 1970, the introduction of low-lead fuels causing compression ratios that had been heading towards diesel territory and power outputs to plummet, and then appear lower still from 1972 when Detroit switched from fantasy gross horsepower numbers to net ratings that more closely resemble how engine output is measured today. By 1975 the chrome bumpers (victims of federal 5mph impact regs) and big-block motors were toast and every Corvette's exhaust manifold gases were herded through a single catalytic converter, leaving the base 350 V8 with just 165bhp. ▶

Chromed wheels? I mean, why not

NEED TO KNOW

The story so far...
Detroit does Europe, and in some style.

What's the appeal?
Corvette as durable and as iconic as the Fifth Amendment – plus the cars aren't bad either.

Corvette in three words...
TVR that works.

Best car...
C8 to drive; the C2 to look at. Chevrolet as a whole? It's hard to look past the era-defining '57 Chevy but look past it we will, to the Impala SS: to-die-for looks and lethal 409 horsepower performance to boot.

Darkest hour...
California's 1980 Vette: a 'tiny' 5.0-litre V8 and auto 'box.

The future looks...
Ultium. GM's new battery-electric platform is rewriting the rulebook to become a thorn in Ford's side.

Get your motor running (before it's replaced with a charisma-free electric version)

THOUGH NOT QUITE A MODERN UNIBODY, THE C4'S STEERING AND SUSPENSION PUT IT ON A DIFFERENT PLANE TO THE C3

But Chevy hadn't totally given up on performance. Steve Jenkins' '75 has the optional 205bhp L82 motor, a plaque on the console behind the surprisingly slick four-speed manual's shifter proudly stating its heady (for the time) 9.0:1 squeeze, and an optional gymkhana suspension pack that perhaps explains why it steers incredibly well for an antique Yank.

And by 1982 the C3, which was essentially a dressed-up '63, really was an antique. The C4 fixed that. Though not quite a modern unibody, the new chassis featured an integrated passenger cell, rack-and-pinion steering, aluminium driveshaft and a lightweight fibreglass transverse rear spring, plus another transverse leaf at the front in place of coils. Handling was on a different plane, which is just as well, because emissions stricter than a Rikers Island guard meant the first 1984 C4's 5.7-litre V8 made just 205bhp.

Yet only six years later a Corvette was one of the fastest cars on the planet thanks to help from GM's recent acquisition, Lotus. The Norfolk crew's aluminium LT5 V8, with its double overhead camshafts, sounds and feels incredibly refined next to its pushrod relatives, but it was the 375bhp output and resulting 175mph top speed and 4.5sec 0-60mph time that earned it the 'King of the Hill' name. Stepping over the awkwardly high sill of Robert Green's striking Competition Yellow car reveals the C4's improved legroom and a controller for the ZR-1-specific Bilstein adjustable dampers and ZF six-speed manual – clearly, Lotus involvement wasn't restricted to the engine.

Though that engine got a boost to 405bhp for 1993, Chevy undermined the ZR-1 in later years, giving the base car the King's convex rear panel, six-ratio 'box and a vastly improved pushrod V8 that made 300bhp from 1992, and cost a heap less to buy. C4 Corvettes are even better value now, but Mark Eastwood knows the C5 that followed in the autumn of 1996 is the true bargain in the Corvette world. A 345bhp, 175mph sports car with a Ferrari-style transaxle layout but none of the Maranello-grade running costs for less than £15k? Damn right it's a bargain.

The now legendary 5.7-litre LS1 aluminium V8 that's become the go-to transplant motor for any amateur engine swap is even pretty good on fuel, capable of nudging 30mpg at a gentle cruise. And doorman-proportioned Eastwood appreciates the additional legroom versus the C4 he owned before. Standing somewhat closer to ground-level, I still find myself wanting a seat set lower and with more side support, but like the meaty steering, snappy throttle response and fantastically clear instruments. And the boot is enormous. I make a mental note to check the classifieds as soon as the shoot is over. ▶

C6 lighter, smaller and sharper than the car it replaced

WE ARE FAMILY

...and we bloody love a leaf spring

1957 C1 284 DUAL QUAD CORVETTE

PRICE $3176 then, £70,000 now **POWERTRAIN** 4.6-litre 16v V8, rear-wheel drive, two-speed auto **PERFORMANCE** 245bhp, 300lb ft, 7.0sec 0-60mph (est), 120mph

The C1 (1953-1962) gets serious from '55 (with V8 power) and sexy from '56 (two-tone Wurlitzer restyle). Early coupe prototype never makes production so all C1s are live-rear-axle roadsters, and have up to 360bhp.

1966 C2 CORVETTE STING RAY

PRICE $4084 then, £60,000 now **POWERTRAIN** 5.4-litre 16v V8, rear-wheel drive, two-speed auto **PERFORMANCE** 300bhp, 360lb ft, 8.3sec 0-60mph, 115mph

C2 (1963-1967) brings the first coupe, though the split window doesn't get a second season. You can still get a convertible. Engines range from a 250bhp 5.7 to a monstrous 425bhp 7.0 during the C2's brief run.

1975 C3 CORVETTE L82

PRICE $6550 then, £15,000 now **POWERTRAIN** 5.7-litre 16v V8, rear-wheel drive, four-speed manual **PERFORMANCE** 205bhp, 255lb ft, 7.0sec 0-60mph, 130mph

C3 (1968-1982) arrives in muscle's golden age, but spends most of its 14-year career battling increasingly tough safety and emissions regs. They kill big-block V8s after 1974 and ensure the convertible doesn't live to '76.

1991 C4 CORVETTE ZR-1

PRICE $58,995 then, £20,000 now (ZR-1) **POWERTRAIN** 5.7-litre 32v V8, rear-wheel drive, six-speed manual **PERFORMANCE** 375bhp, 370lb ft, 4.5sec 0-60mph, 175mph

The all-new C4 (1984-1996) is lighter, stiffer, grippier and faster, despite just 205bhp. A new generation of V8s lift that to 330bhp by '96, but the high point is the Lotus-developed ZR-1 with a dohc aluminium V8 and 175mph top speed.

2001 C5 CORVETTE

PRICE $39,171 then, £15,000 now **POWERTRAIN** 5.7-litre 16v V8, rear-wheel drive, four-speed auto **PERFORMANCE** 345bhp, 350lb ft, 5.3sec 0-60mph, 170mph

Aluminium LS V8 in C5 (1997-2004) is lighter and more powerful, giving the base Corvette 170mph. The transmission is at the back to improve handling. Manual-only Z06 gets upgraded suspension, thin glass and up to 405bhp.

2007 C6 CORVETTE

PRICE $44,995 then, £20,000 now **POWERTRAIN** 6.0-litre 16v V8, rear-wheel drive, six-speed auto **PERFORMANCE** 400bhp, 400lb ft, 4.3sec 0-60mph, 186mph

The designers lose the pop-up lights for the C6 (2005-2013), drop in a bigger 6.0 V8 (later 6.2) and resurrect two names from the past: Z06 brings an aluminium frame and 505bhp V8; ZR1 plumps for a supercharged 6.2.

2017 C7 CORVETTE Z06

PRICE $79,450 then, £60,000 now **POWERTRAIN** 6.2-litre 16v supercharged V8, rear-drive, eight-speed auto **PERFORMANCE** 650bhp, 650lb ft, 3.1sec 0-60mph, 195mph

C7 (2014-2019) looks similar but gets a seven-speed manual. Base car's 455bhp swells to 650bhp in the Z06, which pinches the 'charged 6.2 idea from the old ZR1. Real ZR1 refines the same recipe to generate 755bhp.

2022 C8 CORVETTE

PRICE £81,700 **POWERTRAIN** 6.2-litre 16v mid-engined V8, rear-wheel drive, eight-speed dual-clutch auto **PERFORMANCE** 475bhp, 452lb ft, 3.5sec 0-62mph, 184mph

After decades of prototypes and pleading, Chevy finally puts the horses in the middle of the cart for 2020's C8, and even gives us RHD. Engine is still a basic two-valve pushrod V8, and Euro cars' 475bhp is middling.

THE CORVETTE HAS WEATHERED PLENTY OF STORMS IN ITS 69 YEARS AND IS PROUD OF ITS BACK CATALOGUE

Open that wallet a little wider, though, and you could be opening the throttle to unleash the 400bhp of the C6 that came next. Expanding the V8 to 6.0 litres brought the new 2005 base Corvette's LS2 engine within 5bhp of the previous C5 Z06 performance model's LS6 for almost $10k less, and automatic buyers now had six gears to play with instead of just four. The C6, like the C5, was officially available in the UK, though only in left-hand drive. But Richard Evans' 2007 car was originally sold in Florida, meaning his C6 is cheaper to tax than a genuine Euro-homologated equivalent.

Visually, the C5 and C6 look confusingly similar from some angles, but Evans points out that the newer car looks leaner and sharper, and has fixed headlights, bringing an end to 42 years of pop-up illumination. The Z06 badge returned, this time signalling a lightweight aluminium chassis frame, a balsa wood (yes, really) and composite floor, and an epic 7.0-litre LS7 V8 stomping out 505bhp and an equally stout 470lb ft of tyre-killing torque. But even that looked meek next to the 2009 ZR1, whose 638bhp supercharged 6.2-litre LS9 was visible through a window in the carbon bonnet and reined in by carbon brakes and magnetorheological dampers.

By 2014 the Stingray name was back, and even the 455bhp LT-1-powered base car had a fancy carbon bonnet, aluminium frame, quad exhaust tailpipes and seven-speed manual gearbox with rev-matching software. And that was only the start. A '60s-style horsepower war raging worldwide meant Steve Saunders' Z06 received a supercharged 6.2-litre V8, like the previous ZR1, but made even more power: 650bhp, together with a road-wrinkling 650lb ft.

Saunders' car oozes attitude, yet it's got the traffic manners of a Honda Jazz, albeit one with a Spidey Sense – a brush of brake or accelerator suggests zero inertia. The seats have decent lateral support at last, the steering is just the right side of Ferrari-fast, and the drop-down infotainment screen provides an answer to that age-old problem of where to stash your Glock 9mm.

Or .500 Smith & Wesson, the world's most powerful handgun, I'm told, if you step up to the C7 ZR1. Introduced for 2019 and equipped with a supercharger that's 50 per cent bigger than the Z06's, and a rear wing that would make a 911 GT3 feel inadequate, the ZR1 generated 755bhp and 715lb ft of torque, leaving the world struggling to imagine how much further Chevy could push the Corvette.

Instead, Chevy really did start pushing it, as opposed to pulling it, placing the engine behind the seats for the 2020 C8, ▶

THIS STORY ORIGINALLY APPEARED IN THE **OCTOBER 2022 ISSUE OF *CAR***

C2 Sting Ray right up there with Enzo's 250 GTO and the Jag E-Type

Owner Steve Saunders' bedside reading includes the build story of his Z06

CORVETTE CAR CLUB

SCARED TO LIVE THE DREAM?

Fear not – help is at hand

Writing about a car launched in 1953 and only intermittently sold through official channels in the UK isn't like knocking up a 'greatest BMWs' group test. We couldn't have done it without the generous help of the UK's Classic Corvette Club.

What began life in 1979 as a meeting between three British Corvette enthusiasts today has 1050 members who between them own Corvettes covering every year of the model's 69 seasons. Most popular? That'd be the third-generation, Coke-bottle-shaped C3.

If you're into Corvettes the door's open, whether your car is a £250k big-block rarity, a wildly customised project, seven boxes full of bits, or just a fantasy you turn to when doing the washing up.

The CCC website's forum is available to anyone, but an annual fee unlocks a members-only section, saves you money on insurance, RAC membership and parts from suppliers in the UK and US, and gives access to the technical gurus whose expertise could prove a lifeline when trying to maintain a car thousands of miles from its birthplace.

But best of all it puts you in touch with like-minded people, who supplement the Club's massive two-day annual CCCUK Nationals show and recently added northern event in Ullswater with regional meet-ups, run-what-you-brung days and European road trips. The Corvette has always been big on value, but a measly £40 to get more out of owning one is a steal. You can find the CCC at www.corvetteclub.org.uk

Thank you...
Colin Bruce and the Classic Corvette Club UK; especially C1 owner Bob West, C2 Peter Reeves, C3 Steve Jenkins, C4 Robert Green, C5 Mark Eastwood, C6 Richard Evans, C7 Steve Saunders, C8 Ian Stone

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CORVETTE STINGRAY
H712 EAE

C3 took original idea as far as it could go; C4 a big step forward

THE 2020 C8 PRODUCTIONISED AN IDEA CHEVROLET HAD BEEN TOYING WITH FOR OVER 50 YEARS

finally productionising an idea it had been toying with for over 50 years. I haven't been that enamoured with the C8's Chinese-knock-off-Ferrari styling so far, but Ian Stone's car's rich metallic red coat is light years better than the plain red alternative, giving the C8 an expensive supercar look to match the promise of that new aluminium chassis and 40:60 weight distribution.

Something else is new, and I'm not talking about the Corvette's first-ever (and sadly, mandatory) dual-clutch transmission, incredible fighter-jet-style cockpit or weird square steering wheel. It's that for the first time in Vette history that steering wheel is on the 'correct' side for Brit drivers. Stone waited two and a half years to get a genuine right-hooker and is so taken with the C8 he finds he reaches for its keys ahead of his Ferrari 458's. Praise indeed, but perhaps not entirely surprising given Chevy benchmarked the Ferrari during development, and that the C8 feels vastly more sophisticated, even if its 475bhp European-tune LT2 V8 (US versions get up to 500 horses) still relies on pushrods to open its valves and looks conspicuously underpowered next to (admittedly far pricier) mid-engined rivals.

The new Z06, though, and the other C8s heading this way, will meet those rivals head-on. The Z06 gets a dohc 5.5-litre V8 with 670bhp, a Ferrari-style flatplane crank and an 8600rpm redline, a teased hybrid car rumoured to get the E-Ray name will give us the world first four-wheel-drive Corvette, and leaked documents suggest there's a 1000bhp Corvette waiting in the wings. And don't forget the obligatory electric version.

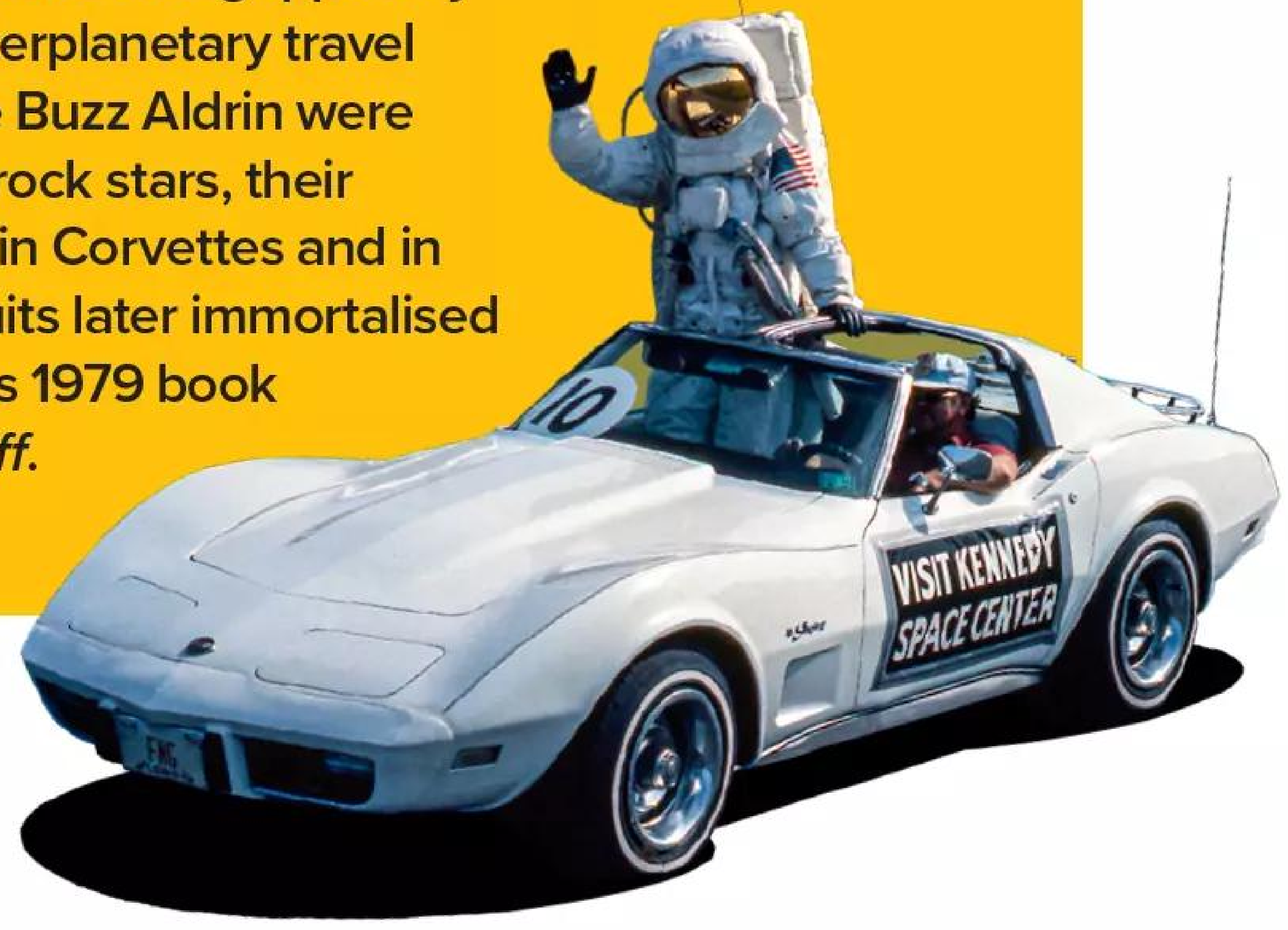
Cars, like magazines, need to stay on their toes if they're to survive and thrive. The Corvette has weathered plenty of storms in its 69-year career, and is proud of its back catalogue – or at least most of it. But like us, it's itching to see where we're all headed next. **car**

CORVETTES AND THE COSMOS

In May 1961 Alan Shepard became the first American in space, and he would have been the first man in orbit if Russian cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin hadn't beaten him to beyond the edge of the Earth's atmosphere by a matter of weeks. But only Shepard was met on his return by GM President Ed Cole holding out the keys to a brand new 1962 Corvette.

NASA didn't allow astronauts to endorse products, though, so enterprising Florida Chevy dealer and 1960 Indy 500 winner Jim Rathmann came up with a clever scheme whereby astronauts could lease up to two Chevys per year for just a buck each. Throughout the '60s and early '70s the space guys got a deal that was out of this world, and GM and Rathmann benefited from a rush of free publicity every time the crew was photographed leaving home or work.

It's easy to forget that in the run-up to the moon landing the public was gripped by the idea of interplanetary travel and pilots like Buzz Aldrin were rocket-riding rock stars, their exploits both in Corvettes and in their space suits later immortalised in Tom Wolfe's 1979 book *The Right Stuff*.



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LION KINGS

When it puts its mind to it, Peugeot wins Le Mans – the beautiful 905 and brutal 908 are testament to that. Can the stunning new hybrid 9X8 honour their legacy?

Words Ben Miller **Photography** John Wycherley

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1992 905B EVO 1 BIS

TODT'S V10 TEARJERKER

Created in the dying days of the Group C era to compete under the FIA's then-new 3.5-litre regulations, the 905 started life neither beautiful nor fit to challenge at Le Mans. But by 1992 it was both, the elegant V10-engined machine winning at Silverstone, Le Mans and Suzuka on its way to glory in the 40th and final running of the FIA World Sportscar Championship. The car recorded a second win at Le Mans the following year, and with that the architect of its success – Peugeot Talbot Sport lynchpin Jean Todt (you may have heard of him) – headed to Maranello to build a new empire in scarlet.

Remarkably, the 905 was created by a team with no prior circuit racing experience. While Peugeot Talbot Sport's Group B 205 T16 had won rallies, bagged drivers' and manufacturers' titles and conquered the Dakar (twice), it and the later 405 (of Pikes Peak legend) taught their maker next to nothing about the fine art of sportscar racing. Work on the 905 began in 1988 and Todt, acknowledging the paucity of relevant experience in his 120-strong Vélizy-based equipe, hired himself something of an A-Team.

Under technical director André de Cortanze (formerly of Alpine and Renault), Robert Choulet (whose CV included the long-tail Porsche 917) sculpted the 905's body and monocoque while French plane manufacturer Dassault was approached to craft these structures in light, stiff and impact-shrugging carbonfibre. Engine Jedi Jean-Pierre Boudy, who'd worked on Renault's successful V6 turbo F1 programme, was tasked with creating the V10: an all-aluminium, 40-valve masterpiece initially rated at a very conservative 600bhp at 12,000rpm… It'd ultimately make nearer 650bhp.

The 905 debuted in 1991. It won races but Le Mans was a disaster, the team battling fuel fires, electrical issues and gearbox failures. The car lacked long-distance development, and both 905s were parked up by dusk.

Cue the montage. The 905's carbon hull was retained but the bodywork much modified for '92, with a lower, stubbier nose shrouding tightly packaged suspension. Ducts on either side of the bubble cockpit fed radiators in sidepods outboard of vast venturis. The engine cover was lowered, for a cleaner airflow onto the enormous biplane rear wing, and the engine made both tougher and more powerful. The gearbox, too, was upgraded (new pinions and revised lubrication) in the light of Peugeot's simulations, which figured a 24-hour race would require no fewer than 18,000 gearshifts…

Todt, already convinced that a great car is nothing without a great

DASSAULT
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FACOM
AIS
L'ESPRIT SECURITE
MONDIAL ASSISTANCE
Pilot SX
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MICHELIN

'UNDER TODT YOU GOT THE FEELING PEUGEOT WANTED TO WIN TODAY, TOMORROW AND THE DAY AFTER THAT'

MECHANIC LAURENT GUYOT

driver, also went in search of top-tier helmsmen.

'At the end of '85 I'd signed for Lotus, to be Senna's team-mate,' explains Derek Warwick, who was right at the top of Todt's hit list. 'But Ayrton made them tear up the contract, so come December '85 I was without a drive. I raced a [Porsche] 962 at Daytona [to third place] and I loved it. F1 is another level, don't get me wrong, but I loved sportscar racing. From there I raced for Jaguar in '86, in the XJR-6, and again in '91, in the XJR-14, which was a purebred racing car – an F1 car with bodywork; simple as that.'

Todt called in late '91. 'He wanted me to be the lead driver in one of his cars for '92: Philippe Alliot, Mauro Baldi and Jean-Pierre Jabouille in one; me, Mark Blundell and Yannick Dalmas in the other,' recalls Warwick. 'We met in Paris, talked money and I left in a huff, playing the old poker game. But we stayed in touch, Jaguar wasn't sure of its plans for '92, Ross Brawn left [for Benetton in F1] and Jean got serious. I signed and we started testing – full 24-hour tests at Paul Ricard [with chicanes on the Mistral straight to simulate those on the Mulsanne]. After two or three 24-hour tests I got to like the car a lot. The engine was good and the car was so, so beautiful. I did a lot of the testing, especially from midnight to dawn. I don't remember seeing much of the other drivers after midnight; they liked their beds.'

Like Warwick, mechanic Laurent Guyot joined the team in January 1992. 'Straight away you got the feeling that you were working for a big company, and that this company wanted to win; it wanted to win today, tomorrow and the day after that,' says Guyot. 'I remember my job interview with Jean Todt like it was yesterday. He is an amazing guy. There was a unique atmosphere inside the team – we knew we were there to win.'

Come June '92 the 905 was at last beautiful and ready to challenge at Le Mans. Metronomically reliable, it was also 14 seconds a lap faster than the '91 905 and four seconds a lap faster than the '92 Toyota…

'In '92 we did a better job [than the sister car] setting up for the race,' says Warwick. 'That helped us save fuel. We were a little slower but we were friends with the car; kinder to it. And every time we swapped drivers we'd yell "Gearbox!" at each other, just to remind the new guy to look after it.'

After an early dogfight between Peugeot, Mazda and Toyota, the number 1 905 set about building a lead. Through the dead of night, as rain lashed the La Sarthe circuit, the Peugeot stayed ahead.

'It was hard work,' says Warwick. 'In the middle of the night ▶

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MAGNETI MARELLI
MICHELIN

> **'JEAN PUT ME IN THE CAR WITH HALF AN HOUR TO GO. HE KNEW HOW IMPORTANT IT WAS FOR ME TO DO SOMETHING SPECTACULAR'**
>
> DEREK WARWICK

someone tugged my arm and told me we were running way off the pace. I turfed Mark out, got back in and did a triple stint. I was good in the wet, and the engine was great – it made good power but it wasn't peaky.'

Sunday morning and, bar a troublesome ignition module (the control unit and battery were swapped in a 12-minute stop), Warwick's 905 was still out front. It went on to win, six laps ahead of the Toyota in second.

'With half an hour to go Yannick was in the car, which was the ideal situation – a French driver winning a French race in a French car,' says Warwick. 'But Jean pulled the car in and gave me that last half an hour. I'd lost my little brother the previous year and it had a massive effect on me. [Paul Warwick lost his life leading an F3000 race at Oulton Park in 1991.] Emotionally I was pretty drained. Jean picked up on this. He would ask me about Paul and he knew how important it was for me to do something spectacular – something to remember Paul by. He brought the car in and let me finish the race. Jean knew how much work I'd put in. I'd driven the car more than anybody in testing and this was my reward. As the clock ticked down I was so emotional; so, so happy. I remember coming on the radio down the Mulsanne and yelling, "Problem! Problem! The car's stopping!" It wasn't, but I was belly-laughing at the thought of the team running around going, "F*ck! F*ck! F*ck!" Afterwards I thought, "Derek, don't tempt fate for f*ck's sake." Of all the cars I raced the 905 stands out – everything about it was just gorgeous.'

'I remember the race as a series of snapshots,' says mechanic Guyot. 'One of them was the first pitstop – us waiting and the car coming down the pitlane. I can see that moment now so clearly, me waiting with my wheel gun to change the front-left wheel. We weren't nervous. We knew that what we were doing was important but we were ready and we were focused. It was magical when we won. For me, the 905 is more than just a racing car. It's special. Even today – not everyday but sometimes – I only have to hear the noise of the 905 and, yeah, I get pretty emotional.' ▶

THIS STORY ORIGINALLY APPEARED IN THE **MARCH 2022 ISSUE OF *CAR***

1992 PEUGEOT 905B
POWERTRAIN 3499cc 40v naturally-aspirated 80° V10, six-speed sequential manual, rear-wheel drive
PERFORMANCE 640bhp @ 12,500rpm
WEIGHT 750kg
GLORY Eight World Sportscar wins from 14 races (1991-1992) including two at Le Mans

Just you, a fire extinguisher and 24 hours in which to enjoy that V10

2009 908 HDi FAP

NATURAL BORN WINNER

To understand just how good a car the 908 was, one must first understand the enormity of the challenge it faced. Audi first contested Le Mans in 1999, its open-cockpit R8Rs coming home third and fourth. The R8 arrived in 2000, and so began an era of startling dominance: four wins from five races in 2000-2005 and, with the turbodiesel R10, further glory in 2006, 2007 and 2008. In this period Audi owned Le Mans; it *was* Le Mans.

Enter the disrupter.

Peugeot unveiled the 908 in 2005. Race engineer Christian Deltombe joined the team in late 2006, just as the 908 programme was shifting from the design and engineering phase to the grubbier, more visceral business of readying a competitive racecar.

'There were some people with knowledge from the 905 still in the team but not many, so in 2006 and 2007 we were building the team at the same time as we were building the car,' explains Deltombe, who's back with Peugeot now on the 9X8 programme. 'I was really happy in terms of the people we had and the philosophy. There was a feeling in the first couple of years of the team slowly gathering its strength, step by step. But after Monza we really started to believe we could win Le Mans again.'

The 908 debuted in the 2007 1000km of Monza, setting a searing pace in qualifying and winning the race. A stream of victories followed through 2007 and 2008, the Peugeot time and again demonstrating its inherent speed, efficiency and (mostly) strong reliability.

Like the R10 Audi, its main rival initially, the 908 used a 5.5-litre twin-turbodiesel V12 (its cylinder banks splayed at 100° to lower the engine's centre of gravity) good for more than 700bhp and 900lb ft of torque. But unlike the R10 the 908 ushered in a new era of closed-cockpit sports prototypes (bar the Bentley, open-cockpit cars had reigned since the late '90s), Peugeot rightly figuring that the operational hassle of doors would be more than offset by increased chassis rigidity and superior aero.

'The closed-cockpit decision was born of two targets: safety for the drivers and aerodynamic efficiency,' explains engineer François Coudrain, who worked on the 908. 'It was a Peugeot decision, as was the turbodiesel engine. The diesel engine was not dictated by Audi. Peugeot had a major diesel strategy [in the wider business] at the time with the particulate filter [the FAP in the car's full name]. For Peugeot the stars aligned with the 908; the decision to go into competition, the diesel strategy of Peugeot and the regulations, which were open to diesels.

'The diesel engine was incredible in terms of torque – for the drivers, it hit them when they left the pits and deactivated the pitlane speed limiter,' continues Coudrain. 'Also, the aero regulations were very open, so we were able to create a very efficient car into which the diesel powertrain was integrated completely.

'The main challenge was maximising performance while optimising the weight and the centre of gravity. This was not easy – to have power without making the engine too heavy.'

The V12's titanic torque made the 908 a fear-

2009 PEUGEOT 908

POWERTRAIN 5486cc 48v twin-turbodiesel 100° V12, six-speed sequential manual, rear-wheel drive
PERFORMANCE 730bhp @ 6000rpm, 920lb ft @ 3500rpm
WEIGHT 930kg (including 30kg of ballast)
GLORY 20 wins from 30 races including one Le Mans win (2009)

> **'THE DIESEL V12 WAS SILKY SMOOTH AND IT HAD LOADS OF TORQUE; WAY MORE THAN AN F1 CAR'**
>
> ANTHONY DAVIDSON

some challenge for its race engineers and drivers. 'For the technical department it was a challenge for sure, and for the gearbox also, because the torque was very high,' explains race engineer Deltombe. 'For us the torque complicated the traction control and tyre management. The diesel engine was also not light, and it shifted the weight distribution [rearward], which again did not help the rear tyres. But the 908 was a nice package; responsive to set-up, efficient and fast.'

Le Mans glory eluded the 908 for two years. But in 2009 Peugeot was again victorious in the world's greatest race, 16 years after the 905's swansong. Former F1 pilot and later Mercedes-AMG simulator driver Anthony Davidson tested the 2009 908. He was blown away by just how good a car the turbodiesel Peugeot was.

'Of all the cars I've raced the 908 suited my driving style the most,' says Davidson. 'I could dominate it, feel brilliant in it and do great lap times every time I drove it. F1 spoils you, and the touring cars and GT cars I'd driven just didn't come close. But the 908 was different. Yes, it was heavier than an F1 car but it didn't require a completely different skill set. I could drive it like an F1 car full of fuel plus a bit more.'

Not only did the 908 feel like an F1 car, it shrunk racetracks with a comparable combination of low weight, huge downforce and monstrous speed. 'It had slightly less power but the diesel V12 was silky smooth and it had loads of torque; way more than an F1 car,' remembers Davidson. 'Back then an F1 car made peak torque at 17,000rpm. The 908 was delivering something like 920lb ft at 3500rpm! Unbelievable. [Ferrari's ferocious SF90 hybrid develops a combined 590lb ft of torque…] You could be in any gear and it'd just pull. The 908 was just an absolute joy to drive. I loved it.'

Davidson joined Peugeot for 2010, driving a lightly revised V12 908. It was an opportunity he relished. The car might have been designed for him, so sweetly did it dovetail with his F1-derived driving style, and the team was fired with a passion the likes of which he hadn't seen before.

'You're used to the standards at which F1 operates,' says Davidson. 'You question whether any other category will come close. But Peugeot Sport was an incredibly professional outfit and I loved their emotion. It was very raw; very French. For a stiff-upper-lip Brit it was a joy to be a part of. They were just so dedicated to the spirit of endurance racing.' ▶

Was diesel ever sexy? The 908 is as close as it ever got

2022 9X8

ONCE MORE UNTO THE BREACH

TotalEnergies
9X8
PEUGEOT
PEUGEOT

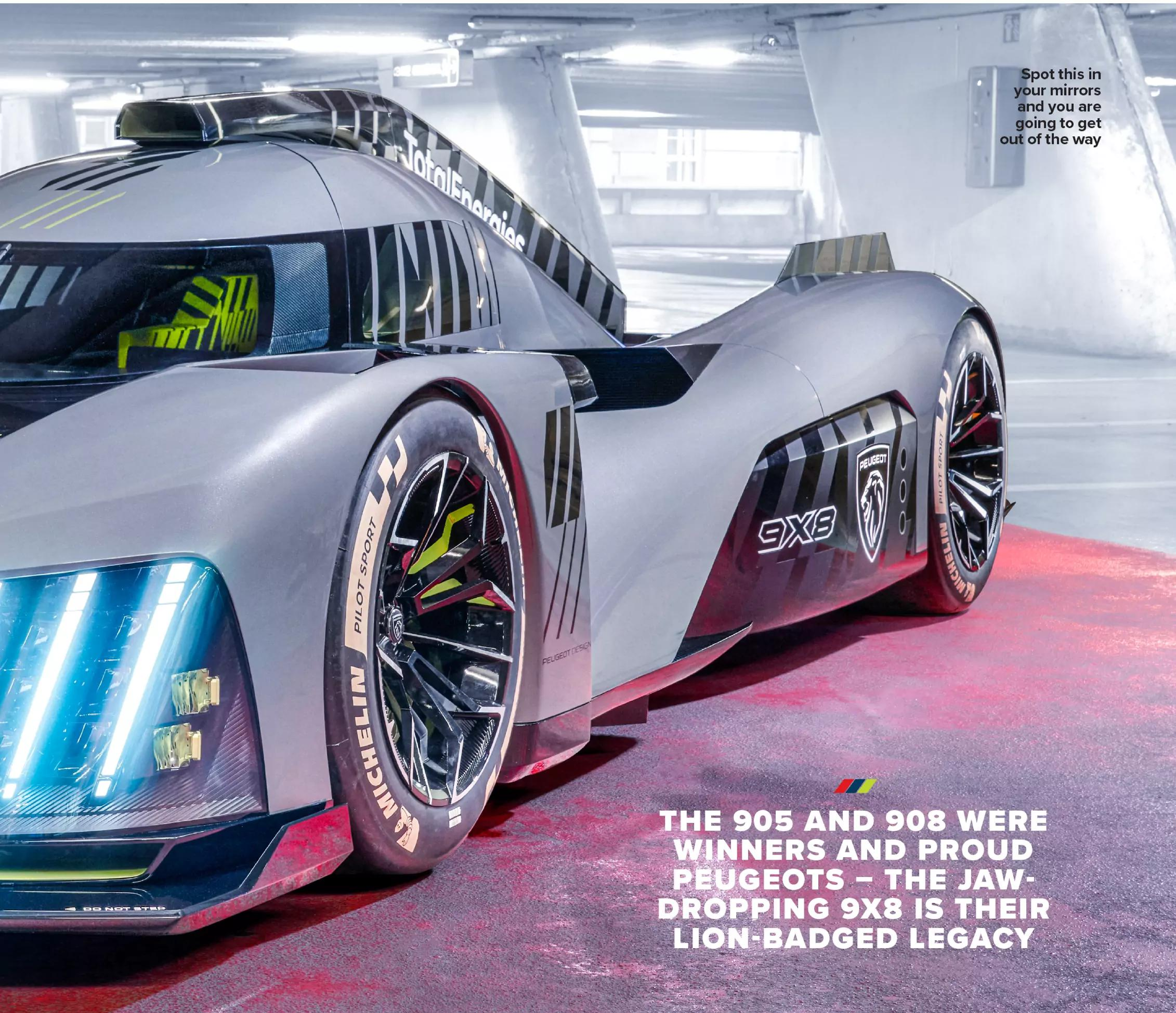
The story of the diesel 908 has a not-all-that-secret Easter egg of a secret ending. Locked in a titanic struggle for supremacy with Audi, Peugeot continued to develop the car at a furious rate. For 2011 a 3.7-litre V8 replaced the big V12, trading perhaps 150bhp for increased agility, efficiency and speed over a race distance. Audi claimed the big prize, Le Mans, but Peugeot won five of seven races to secure the LMP1 manufacturers' cup, the precursor to the World Endurance Championship. And for 2012 Peugeot readied an experimental diesel-electric hybrid 908, the HYbrid4. It was to battle Audi's upgraded R18 alongside a couple of non-hybrid V8 908s.

'Development of the hybrid 908 began in 2011, and the plan was to debut the car at Sebring in 2012,' explains François Coudrain, who worked across the 908's V12, V8 and hybrid programmes. 'By 2012 the development work was complete. We'd validated the car in testing. It was ready to race.'

Imagine the shock, then, when Peugeot announced its immediate withdrawal from the sport just weeks ahead of Sebring. 'This decision has been taken in the context of a difficult economic environment in Europe,' read a statement issued on 18 January, deadline day for the registration of entries for the 2012 season.

The team was heartbroken, as was driver Anthony Davidson. 'I felt robbed,' he says. 'I felt sad that the programme ended so soon and so abruptly, and it was a real shame we never got to try the hybrid package. It was set to be a pretty phenomenal car, one that would have pushed the boundaries of hybrid technology [LMP1 really embraced hybridisation a few years later, with Toyota, Audi, Porsche and Nissan all developing petrol-electric hybrids]. But this is the double-edged sword of manufacturers in motorsport. You really need them, and their presence always raises the bar. But you always know it's for a finite amount of time, and that they can pull the plug, sometimes for reasons that have nothing to do with racing, at any time. Often it's a decision from the marketing side, or from the board of directors. From a corporate point of view it may make sense to them but as true racers you have to live through it. It's like Honda in F1. They came, they left, they came back and now they're leaving again.'

Fortunately, sportscar racing's cycle of feast and famine is now gearing up for a few years of bacchanalian revelry. The good times – and the manufacturers – are back, drawn by the glittering prize of


Spot this in your mirrors and you are going to get out of the way

THE 905 AND 908 WERE WINNERS AND PROUD PEUGEOTS – THE JAW-DROPPING 9X8 IS THEIR LION-BADGED LEGACY

immortality [2023 is the big one: the 100th running of the Le Mans 24 Hours] and a set of regulations that both showcase technology relevant to global marketing and, crucially, offer something like a sustainable return on investment.

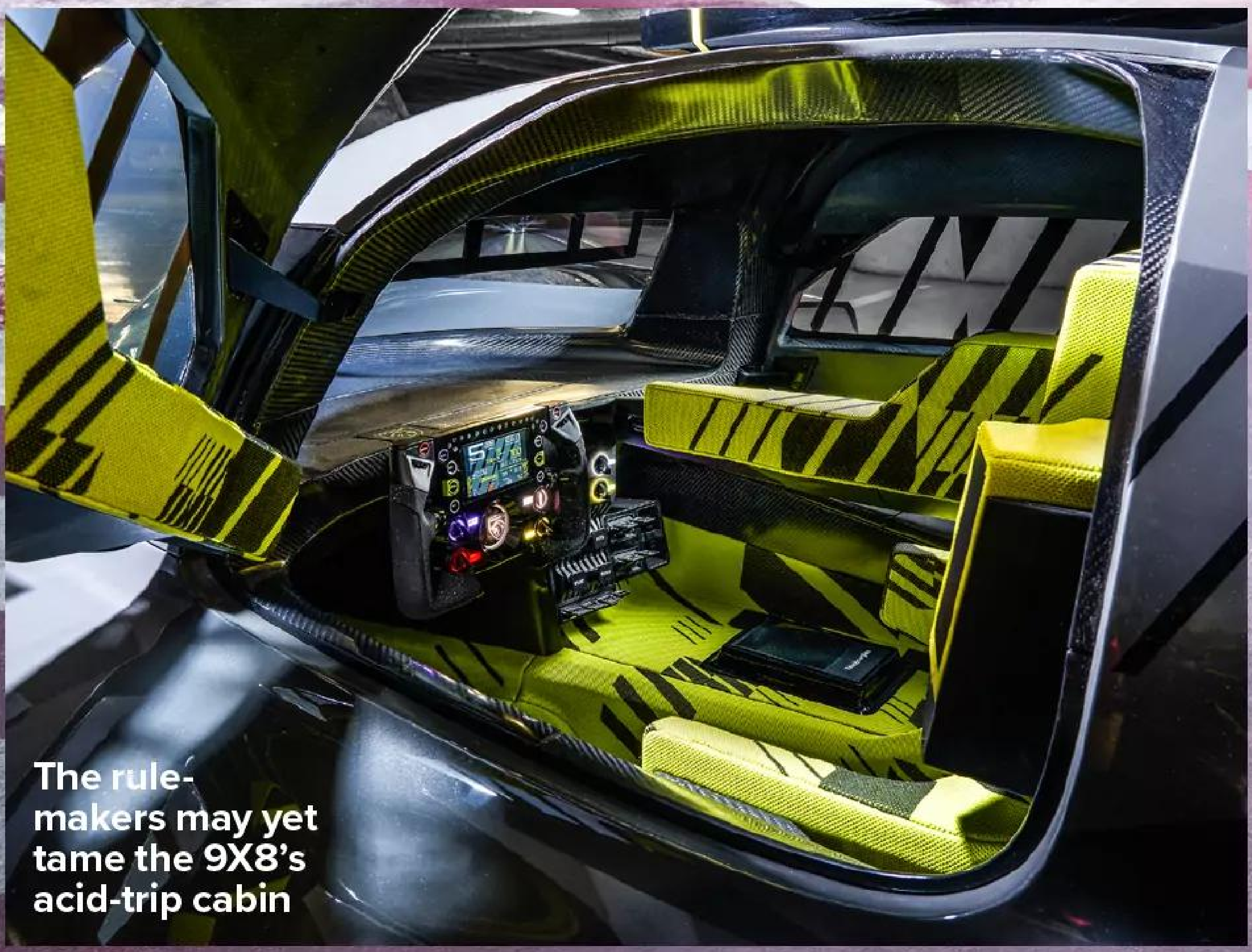
This, then, is the dawn of Peugeot's third endurance racing age. The 905 and 908 were winners and heart-on-sleeve proud Peugeots – the jaw-dropping and ferociously sexy 9X8 is their lion-badged legacy.

The new Hypercar rules have hybrid power at their core (key to marketing, and therefore participation) and promise lap times not far off the big-money prototypes. Crucially, though, the freedom to innovate technically – and therefore the cost of entry – is reduced. There are two categories. LMH is the 'purer' of the two, and the one Peugeot (and Ferrari and Toyota, among others) have committed to. LMDh is the more affordable option. Audi, BMW and Porsche to name but three have decided this is the one for them. In theory cars from both classes will vie for overall honours.

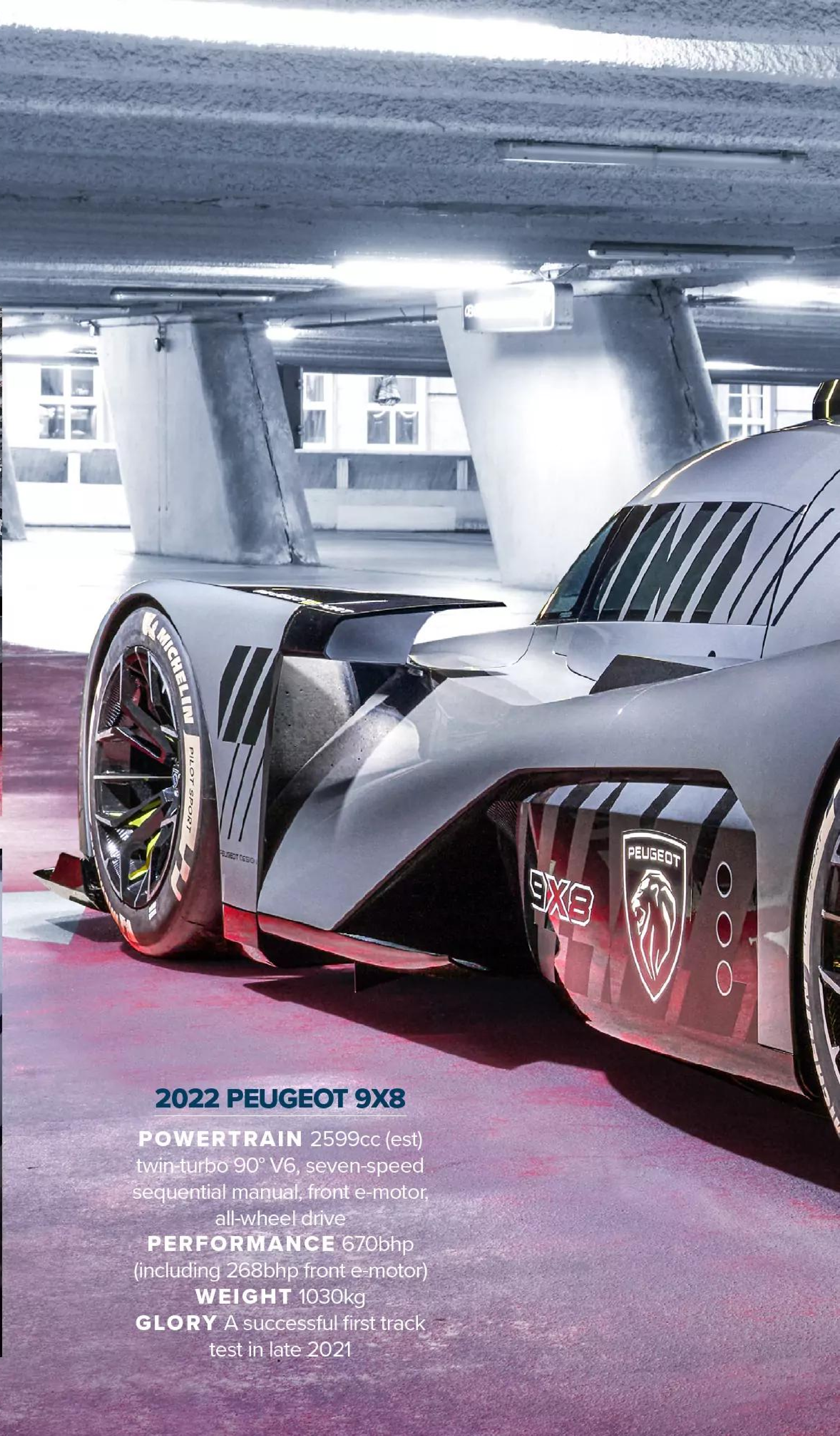
In line with the regulations, the 9X8 combines a 2.6-litre, twin-turbo 90° V6 driving the rear axle (V10, V12 and V8 turbodiesels, turbo-hybrid V6… Peugeot's sportscar powertrain trajectory certainly reflects what Peugeot CEO Linda Jackson describes as the marque's 'energy transition' to electric) with a 900-volt battery and a 268bhp front e-motor. The result is an all-wheel-drive machine with a combined output of some 670bhp.

'The 9X8's general powertrain architecture is dictated by the regulations, but within those we made some specific technical choices pertaining to the transmission, the battery and the internal-combustion engine,' explains powertrain engineer Coudrain. 'With the petrol engine the priorities were the same as the 908's turbodiesel V12 – a low centre of gravity and complete reliability. We are happy with the performance in terms of latency [turbo lag], the weight and the power. The output and location of the electric motor/MGU [motor generator unit] is dictated by the regulations but we have a lot of control over the energy and torque management. We're putting a lot of our focus into this software, working closely with the [DS] Formula E team, particularly on energy regeneration strategies. All the Stellantis motorsport teams are located together, working towards their own targets but sharing experience and expertise.' ▶

Design director Matthias Hossan had a 905 brought to the 9X8 design studio



The rule-makers may yet tame the 9X8's acid-trip cabin



2022 PEUGEOT 9X8

POWERTRAIN 2599cc (est) twin-turbo 90° V6, seven-speed sequential manual, front e-motor, all-wheel drive
PERFORMANCE 670bhp (including 268bhp front e-motor)
WEIGHT 1030kg
GLORY A successful first track test in late 2021

In a Brutalist and brutally cold Parisian multi-storey car park, the 9X8 looks little short of sensational. Comprised of dynamic volumes studded with bold details, it combines much of the 905's elemental elegance with an aggressive, space-age aesthetic appropriate for sportscar racing's new and highly competitive hybrid era.

The echoes of 905 are no accident. 'The 905 is one of the most iconic endurance racing cars ever,' says design director Matthias Hossan, who joined Peugeot in 2012. 'I asked the museum to send a 905 to our design workshop. When you see the 905's silhouette you instantly understand the car and you remember it; it's super-easy to identify. We tried to achieve this with the 9X8.

'The balance of performance rules [a performance-tweaking mechanism by which the faster cars will be pegged back and the racing kept close] made it possible to design something really different,' continues Hossan. 'And this really was a design job, not a styling job. It was a constant collaboration with Peugeot Sport's engineers. We'd design a form and immediately send the data over for evaluation by CFD on the computer. The aerodynamics meant it was a real challenge mentally. As designers we're used to working on surfaces. Here we had to flip that and almost design the negative space – the shapes around the surfaces that you want the airflow to follow.

'In terms of design the diesel 908 was all about performance – there is very little brand DNA. The 905 was both; performance and, from a design perspective, very much a Peugeot. It has that feline stance. Hopefully the 9X8 too is both. But it is not just a retro 905-inspired design. We wanted to create an optimistic vision of the future.'

There is much to be optimistic about. The team's Le Mans track record speaks for itself, and the expertise and passion that powered the 905 and 908 to glory are undimmed. Indeed some of those working on the 9X8 now, including Guyot, Deltombe and Coudrain, were there on those triumphant Sunday afternoons years ago. Now the lion will tackle racing's most daunting challenge once again, and dream of a prize made all the more special by the massed ranks of storied rivals hellbent on victory.

'These new regulations will write a great new chapter for endurance racing,' says Laurent Guyot. 'It is too soon to say which of these Peugeots is the greatest. The 9X8 must write its story before we can judge that.' **car**

TotalEnergies
MICHELIN
PILOT SPORT

THE EXPERTISE AND PASSION THAT POWERED THE 905 AND 908 TO GLORY ARE UNDIMMED

THE LE MANS MAGIC IN THE 508 SPORT ENGINEERED

It's tempting to dismiss any parallels drawn between a sports-racing prototype and a four-door 508 as marketing spin. But racing cars and road cars are interwoven in Peugeot's performance hybrid development story, with the former serving as proof of concept for the latter and as a development tool – the 508 Sport Engineered's hybrid power deployment and regen strategies were honed using lessons learned in sportscar and Formula E competition.

'We started to develop the idea of a hybrid performance road car when Peugeot Sport began developing the 908 HYbrid4 [2011] – that's when we first saw the potential in the technology,' explains project manager Jean-Philippe Delaire. 'Our simulations showed that the hybrid 908 could win, and it led us to take a different approach. With most hybrids the goals are reduced emissions and consumption. But we were in the same building as the 908 HYbrid4 team and we were aligned with them. Yes, the hybrid system could improve fuel consumption. But it could also increase performance. This was the lasting impression the 908 HYbrid4 made on me – that when the drivers went for the throttle at the end of the corner there was immediate and very strong acceleration. The first prototype road car was the 308 R HYbrid in 2015. It made a very good impression on everyone who tested it [reviews were universally positive]. It convinced us we should go further and put this technology in a road car on general sale – that car is the Peugeot 508 Sport Engineered.'

TYPE R

Arai

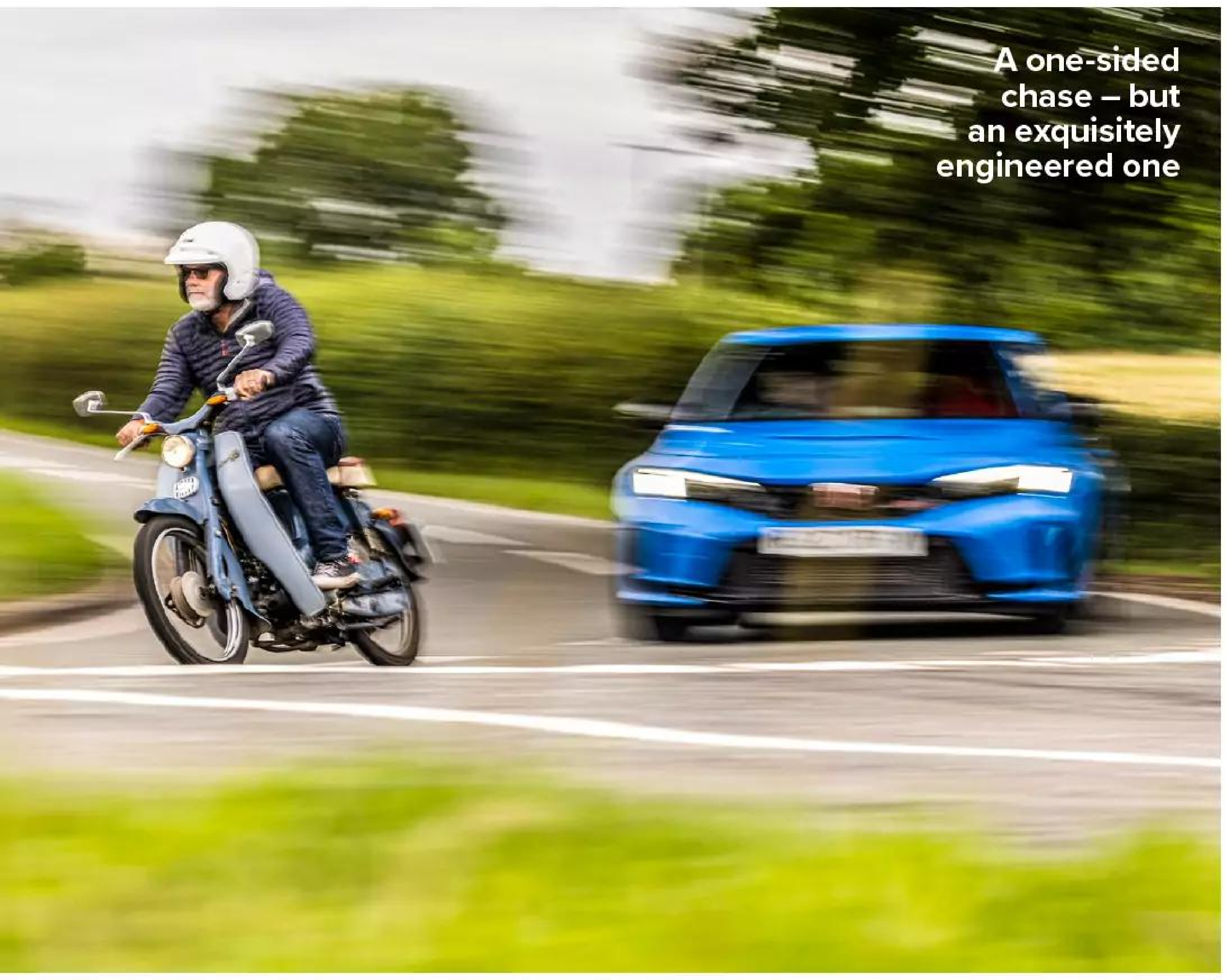
MY05 NSX

brembo
ÖHLINS
marchesini

FIGHT CUB

Honda's Cub, built in its tens of millions, is 65 years old. The two-wheeled Beetle or 2CV, it's a masterpiece, no question. But is it the greatest Honda ever built?

Words Colin Goodwin **Photography** Charlie Magee


A one-sided chase – but an exquisitely engineered one

The late LJK Setright had a very particular respect and admiration for Honda

Sixty-five years ago the Honda Motor Co created a machine that has played a more significant role in the lives of human beings than any motor vehicle before or since. Launched in 1958 and produced ever since by Honda and under licence by other companies, total sales of the Cub in its many guises have passed 120 million.

Many companies might have been content to stick with making simple utilitarian vehicles but Honda was founded by a man with limitless imagination. Soichiro Honda was a firm believer in proving engineering on the racetrack, and within 10 years of launching the Cub he had shown the world what his engineers were capable of, in both two- and four-wheel racing. And in particular what they could do with the four-stroke reciprocating-piston engine. Jewel-like motorcycle engines, revving reliably to sky-high limits, raced during the '60s and provided Honda with the knowledge to produce equally incredible powerplants for the road.

Honda has a following quite unlike any other company. There is a cult aspect, particularly for individual models like the Gold Wing touring bike and S2000 roadster. But also a deep respect for the engineering behind its vehicles. The late LJK Setright, although he appreciated the work of Ferrari, Porsche and others, had a very particular respect and admiration for Honda, and owned many of its products.

To celebrate the Cub's birthday we've brought together a diverse selection of Hondas that perfectly illustrate the firm's technical brilliance. Choosing which motorcycles should be included was particularly challenging. The original CB750 of 1969 that nearly finished off the British motorcycle industry or the amazing 1978 six-cylinder CBX, perhaps? Or the game-changing FireBlade, CBR600 or VFR sportsbikes? But the bike that we feel encapsulates Honda's philosophy and technical brilliance like no other is the 2015 RC213V-S, the state of the V4-engined motorcycle art.

What a machine. It is as close as you can get to a road-legal MotoGP racer, sharing 80 per cent of its components with the Grand Prix bike. It has steel valve springs versus the race bike's pneumatic activation, and it doesn't have carbon brakes and quite the same steering geometry (thankfully). But that's about it. It cost £137,000 new and is probably worth more than that now, especially given that this bike – owned by Honda – is immaculate and low-mileage.

Our choice of four-wheeled Hondas is truly diverse, from the '60s S800 with its motorcycle-inspired high-revving four-cylinder engine to the NSX supercar, launched in 1989 to show the world that a mid-engined exotic need not be difficult to live with or require a £5000 clutch replacement every two years.

Let's get to it. Honda offered a Sports Kit for track versions of the RC213V-S that included a new ECU, a front ram duct, revised exhaust, different spark plugs and a quickshifter. Sounds innocent, but it boosts power from an 'ordinary' 159bhp – in a tiny machine weighing 170kg! – to more than 200bhp. Even without it, the RCV is savagely fast. You only need first and second gears (there are six in total) to keep up with an enthusiastically driven Civic Type R on quick country roads – and to get you booked on to a speed awareness course.

Truth is, I'm past it for riding superbikes fast on the public road. My imagination is better than it used to be, my reactions not so. Still, you don't need to ride like your trousers are on fire to appreciate the magnificence of this machine. Its lightness, meticulously centred ▶

And you thought all Civics looked the same

SPIRIT OF SOICHIRO

NSX

An impossible act to follow, the original is so good the hybrid second generation never stood a chance

PRICE £68,000 (2005)
POWERTRAIN 3179cc V6, six-speed manual, rear-wheel drive
PERFORMANCE 290bhp, 1445kg, 5.6sec 0-60mph, 168mph

CRX

Fast and feisty front-drive hatch laid the foundations for subsequent hot hatch greatness

PRICE £7950 (1986)
POWERTRAIN 1590cc four-cylinder, four-speed manual, front-wheel drive
PERFORMANCE 134bhp, 860kg, 8.1sec 0-62mph, 124mph

INTEGRA TYPE R

Pre-turbo, pre-torque steer and the ultimate and highly tactile argument for front-wheel drive in fast cars

PRICE £22,500 (1997)
POWERTRAIN 1797cc four-cylinder, six-speed manual, front-wheel drive
PERFORMANCE 187bhp, 1125kg, 6.2sec 0-62mph, 145mph

CIVIC TYPE R

Honda perfected the hot hatch with the last Civic Type R. This one is even better, somehow

PRICE £49,995 (2023)
POWERTRAIN 1996cc turbo four-cylinder, six-speed manual, front-wheel drive
PERFORMANCE 325bhp, 1429kg, 5.4sec 0-62mph, 171mph

RC213V-S

AMG claims its One is an F1 engine in a road car. This is a MotoGP bike with number plates

PRICE £137,000 (2015)
POWERTRAIN 999cc V4, six-speed manual, rear-wheel drive
PERFORMANCE 159bhp (215bhp with kit), 170kg, n/a 0-62mph, 186mph

S800

Imagine the smallest sports car you've ever driven. Now shrink it again by at least another 50 per cent

PRICE £779 (1968)
POWERTRAIN 791cc four-cylinder, four-speed manual, rear-wheel drive
PERFORMANCE 70bhp, 771kg, 13.6sec 0-62mph, 100mph

CUB

The horse began the mobilisation of humanity – Honda perfected it with the mighty Cub

PRICE £82.95 (1964)
POWERTRAIN 49cc single, three-speed manual, rear-wheel drive
PERFORMANCE 4.5bhp, 65kg, n/a 0-62mph, 43mph

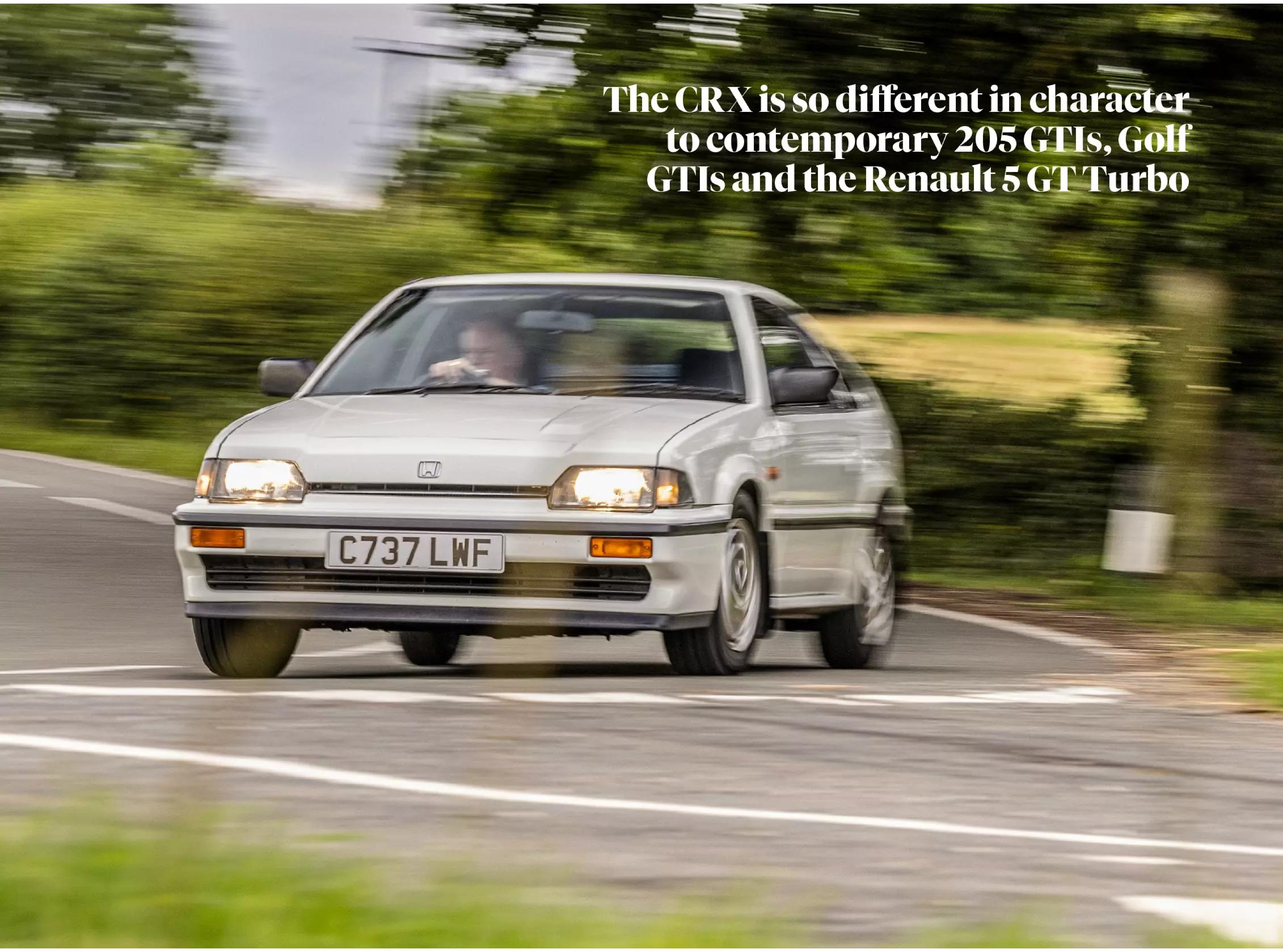
CIVIC

The hatchback as the perfect modern motor car, easy, reliable and convenient? It began right here

PRICE £1059 (1975)
POWERTRAIN 1169cc four-cylinder, five-speed manual, front-wheel drive
PERFORMANCE 50bhp, 790kg, 15.6sec 0-62mph, 95mph

MY05 NSX
V679 ELT
RJ72 TRV
DWV 199G
MLA 993P
HRC
HONDA

Two hard-working brains, 10 hard-working cylinders



The CRX is so different in character to contemporary 205 GTIs, Golf GTIs and the Renault 5 GT Turbo

Delicate next to today's turbo hyper hatches

'Hey Honda, I'm too warm.' Open a window then

mass and ride quality – thanks to its top-spec Öhlins suspension – combine in a riding experience as measured as it is violent. And then there's the V4 engine with its gear-driven camshafts (an expensive but bulletproof solution to valvetrain issues in high-revving engines), a configuration Honda made its own and used to great effect on the RC30 and RC45 superbikes. The any-rev drive and mournful exhaust note are both exquisite and addictive.

Time for a change of pace, not least so we can be on the lookout for examples of 'Hondaness' in more humble machinery – characteristics and details that exhibit Honda's sumptuous engineering. Features that rival manufacturers would be hard pressed to copy.

There's no better example than the bijou S800. Successor to the earlier S500 and S600, the S800 was launched in 1967 and sold as a roadster and a coupe; 1548 found homes in the UK from that date until 1970. The details are magical. A swept volume of 791cc, double overhead camshafts and four individual constant-vacuum Keihin carburettors. Maximum power of 70bhp at 8000rpm – that's not the redline, though; there's another 500rpm to run.

For size the S800 reminds me of Suzuki's Cappuccino. Its weight of 771kg is not so different, either. What a joy to drive such a small car on clear roads. I'd been warned that the brakes aren't great but if you're used to '60s cars they're not too bad. The gearbox is a gem, a four-speed with an extremely short throw. This is good because you do a lot of gearchanging, keeping the little motor on the boil. What's particularly impressive, apart from the smoothness of the engine, is how clean the carburation is. I suspect those carbs are from Honda's 450cc Black Bomber twin that was built around the same time. Imagine what you'd have to do to a BMC A-Series engine to get it to rev to 8500rpm – and how long it would last if you did… Gordon Murray owns an S800 as part of his collection that celebrates light weight. A man of taste is Gordon.

We don't have an S2000 here today, the obvious successor to the S800 roadster (some love it; some don't), but we do have an Integra Type R. High-revving engine, fantastic gearchange and astonishingly good to drive. Our stunning red example is a DC2, the only version officially imported into the UK and one of only 500 that were.

The 1.8-litre four-cylinder VTEC-equipped engine produces 187bhp and revs to a redline set at 8700rpm. That peak horsepower arrives at 8000rpm, and peak torque just 700rpm before that. You really do need to rev the engine, and that's what makes it so much fun to drive. The kerbweight is only 1125kg thanks to a thinner windscreen and less sound-deadening than the regular car.

I'd put the Integra at the podium end of the list of best handling front-wheel-drive cars in all history, together with the Renault Clio 182 Trophy and the Peter Stevens-penned Lotus Elan. Not just best handling in terms of outright grip but for driving pleasure. The steering is quick and has lots of feel, picking up every memo from the road via relatively narrow tyres.

Stepping from the Integra Type R into the Civic Type R is thought-provoking. It's an FL5, the current model, and – as with the two that came before – it features a turbocharged engine. Make no mistake, the 2.0-litre 325bhp engine is very impressive. But I can't help but feel adding forced induction removes a key element of Hondaness. Powerful and impressively gutsy though it is, this engine feels like it could have come from *any* manufacturer.

The current Civic Type R is a formidable car. No doubt it holds a Nürburgring lap record. But it's many years since I have paid any attention to manufacturer willy-waving at the 'Ring. What matters is that the Type R is not only very quick around a circuit, but also ▶

OTHER HONDAS WE'VE LOVED

#1 THE MEAN MOWER

116.575mph. On a mower. That was the figure Honda achieved for a Guinness World Record, on a machine that could cut grass. And with *CAR*'s deputy editor in the seat. I cooked up the idea for the daft mower on a diesel Civic launch. Honda duly squirrelled some budget away, spoke to Team Dynamics (then Honda's BTCC outfit) and a few months later it was ready: a HF2620 ride-on mower with a VTR1000 superbike engine. Driving it needed faith and gentle inputs. With the power-to-weight ratio of a dragster and the wheelbase of a housefly, it wasn't overly stable. Daft and off-the-wall; Hondaness distilled. PW

The first-gen Civic was the car with which Honda went mainstream

THIS STORY ORIGINALLY APPEARED IN THE **OCTOBER 2023 ISSUE OF *CAR***

Tucked up behind the Civic for a little more speed...

civilised on the road. With more power than the Integra R and more grip it would be faster point to point, but no more enjoyable. The older car's narrower tyres give a more immediate sensation and the rev-hungry nature of its engine raises the hairs on the back of your neck. The Integra certainly beats the hot Civic for Hondaness.

Our yellow 1975 Civic has a fairly staid engine compared to the S800 and Integra Type R, its 1169cc single-overhead-camshaft engine producing a modest 50bhp at 5500rpm. While the Civic's engine doesn't perform heroics or have any technical marvels, it is nevertheless smooth and quiet – more refined for sure than would be the equivalent Ford crossflow pushrod engine.

The Civic was also a car that introduced many customers to the concept of an engine that wasn't only reliable, but that wouldn't need a de-coke or a re-bore after a few years of ownership. The first-generation Civic was the car with which Honda went mainstream, focusing all that internal-combustion expertise not into oddball exotica but into a supremely convenient and easygoing machine for the masses: 'Honda, we make it simple' ran the tagline. Its timing was also immaculate. It arrived in the wake of the oil crisis, just as buyers were looking for something to make their gallon (US and imperial) go further, and in the UK Nissan and Toyota had already begun to warm people up to the idea of buying Japanese. A landmark car, then, certainly – although the driving experience is understandably ordinary in this exalted company.

Like the Civic, this white CRX Mk1 is also part of Honda's heritage collection. This is the one with a 1.6-litre 16-valve engine (when 16 valves were worth a badge and shouting about) and just under 140bhp; a good specific output for the mid '80s. It's a compact, stylish coupe with character. When I was at *CAR* in the late '80s we had a long-term-test CRX and that one had a VTEC engine; the first that any of us had experienced. What a pocket rocket that was, so different in character to contemporary GTIs and the Renault 5 GT Turbo.

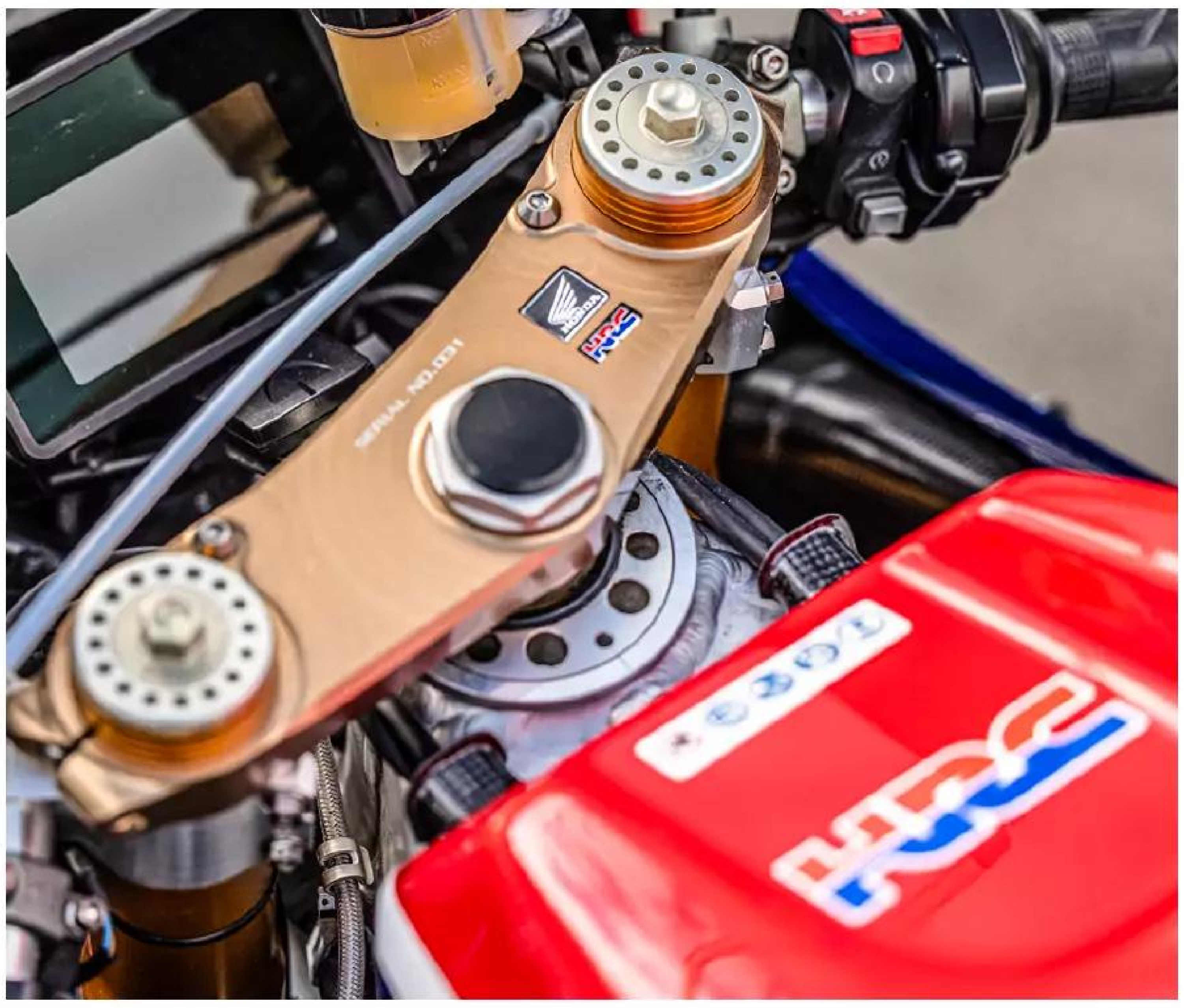
But what of our Honda Cub? What memories. A schoolfriend's family owned Rye's of Fulham, a well-known Honda bike ▶

OTHER HONDAS WE'VE LOVED

#2 THE HONDAJET

The HondaJet is certified for single-pilot operation, the idea being the owner will fly it. The starting procedure is automatic; you simply call up a checklist on the screen and scroll through it. Once running, the engines are inaudible.

The HondaJet is a real hot rod, with a cruising speed of 420 knots and a maximum climb rate of 4000ft per minute. The ceiling is 43,000ft, which puts it above airliners and most weather. When I flew it, the controls were light and responsive. Dynamic, exciting and easy to live with. It is an NSX for the skies. CG



HRC (top) is Honda Racing Corporation. Not much HRC in the Cub

> My Cub cost less than two quid to fill up – and that lasted me for more than a week

dealership, and there were always plenty of bikes at his house to play with, including a Honda 50 with its legshields removed. I would have been one of many teenagers whose introduction to powered two-wheelers was via a Honda 50 field bike. Then there was the C90 that I owned, bought for £40 and ridden around London when I was a motorcycle courier seconded to Thomas Cook's visa department. With only short journeys between the office in the Barbican and embassies, the C90 was perfect. I seem to remember it cost less than two quid to fill up – and that lasted me for more than a week.

Cub enthusiast Chris Crawford's highly original C100 Cub is the first I've ridden since that C90 almost 40 years ago. You don't forget, though. The rocker gearlever, and the word 'Top' inscribed on the speedometer just before 30mph. It is virtually impossible to blow one of these up but it sounds a bit frenetic over 30mph, so I don't push it.

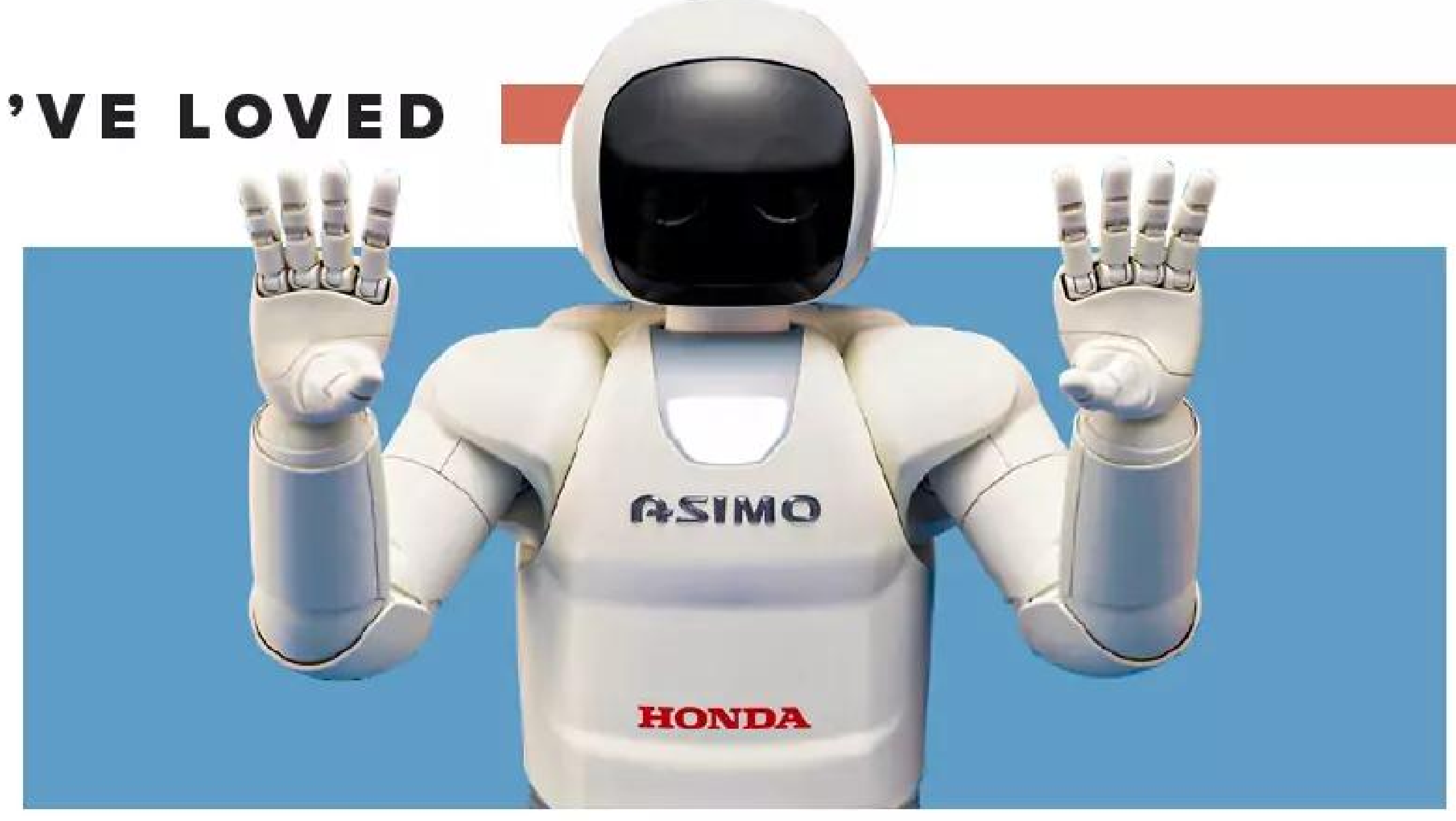
What wonderfully relaxed motoring it is to thrum along on a Cub. I feel like I'm on holiday. The Cub has a centrifugal clutch but it's quite an art to set the tickover so that it's not so fast that the bike tries to go off without you but high enough for the engine not to stall. Kickstarting the engine is easy but Honda also sold a model called the C102 which had electric start – part of Honda's ambition of bringing motorcycling to everyone, regardless of sex or age.

From the sublime to the ridiculously sublime. The NSX here is a series two, obvious from the lack of pop-up headlamps. It also has a 3.2-litre engine whereas the original car had a 3.0-litre motor. I've loved the NSX from day one, and since it was launched in 1989 have never missed an opportunity to drive one. And always I'm surprised at just how small it feels. The view over the bonnet is superb, with flat tops to the wings that make the car extremely easy to place on the road. The Mk1 car had a very modest 270bhp, which ▶

OTHER HONDAS WE'VE LOVED

#3 STIRLING'S ACTY

It's a little-known fact but the late Sir Stirling Moss had a relationship with Honda that lasted over 20 years. It didn't involve screaming VTEC engines, Formula 1 or even a car. Instead it was this Honda Acty and its predecessor. Moss struck up a relationship with Honda in the late '80s and early '90s and arranged an extended loan of a second-gen Acty for his property business. Such was Moss's love for the Acty he requested a third-generation model on its announcement, Honda UK specially importing this one before lending it to the family for another decade. AT-J



#4 ASIMO

Perhaps because the look is deliberately cute and unthreatening, I was entirely unprepared for my meeting with ASIMO, the public face of Honda's ambitious (and expensive) robotics programme. At a modest 4ft 3in, ASIMO should not have been unnerving. Crisply rendered in light grey plastic and with the facial expression of a stoned kitten, it's as far removed from the horrors of dystopian sci-fi as it's possible to imagine. But ASIMO was unnerving. As soon as he loped across the stage at almost 4mph and fired a football into a hastily erected goal at the other end, I freaked out. BM

RJ72 TRV
MY05 NSX
HONDA

Goodwin (left) sets the pace in mixed conditions

TACHOMETER
rpm x1000

Park it in direct sunlight for a few hours, then go in wearing shorts

Civic's come a long way. But still appeals for similar reasons

Championship White has cult status. But red ones are faster

V4 engine bundles the heavy bits right in the middle, boosting agility

Quite a few journalists crashed or spun NSXs in the day, several of them pretty tasty drivers

seemed adequate at the time; the 3.2-litre motor has 290bhp. The rather ordinary trim inside the NSX was criticised when the car was launched but Honda intended that its sports car be used everyday, so went for proven and rugged cabin furniture. The aluminium chassis and bodywork were also novel at the time.

Quite a few journalists crashed or spun NSXs in the day, several of them pretty tasty drivers. I think people thought that they couldn't come unstuck in a Honda and forgot that it was still a mid-engined car. Also, the high-revving engine and lightness of the car encouraged exuberant driving. Today the NSX feels surefooted, light and very manageable. I'd forgotten how special this VTEC engine is and how good it sounds when revved hard. Its power output looks ludicrously lame compared to the Civic Type R, let alone a modern supercar like a McLaren 720S, but the car is more rewarding to drive.

So which is the greatest Honda here? The Integra Type R is a wonderful car and is one of the best cars the company has made to show off its prowess at building great and exciting engines. But it's the NSX that takes the laurels. It's the first car with which Honda put as much effort, thought and ingenuity into the chassis as it had the engine. It's also packed with Hondaness – a sports car with the company's philosophy that a Honda must be easy to operate and to live with.

But we finish a remarkable day with a final thought on the Cub. Chris Crawford reports that his '64 Cub will happily do 120 miles on a gallon of fuel, proving that the machine that's spent 65 years motorising millions is still relevant today as affordable, economical and traffic-busting transport. And at less than £4000 brand new, the contemporary Super Cub 125 is unfashionably good value. **car**

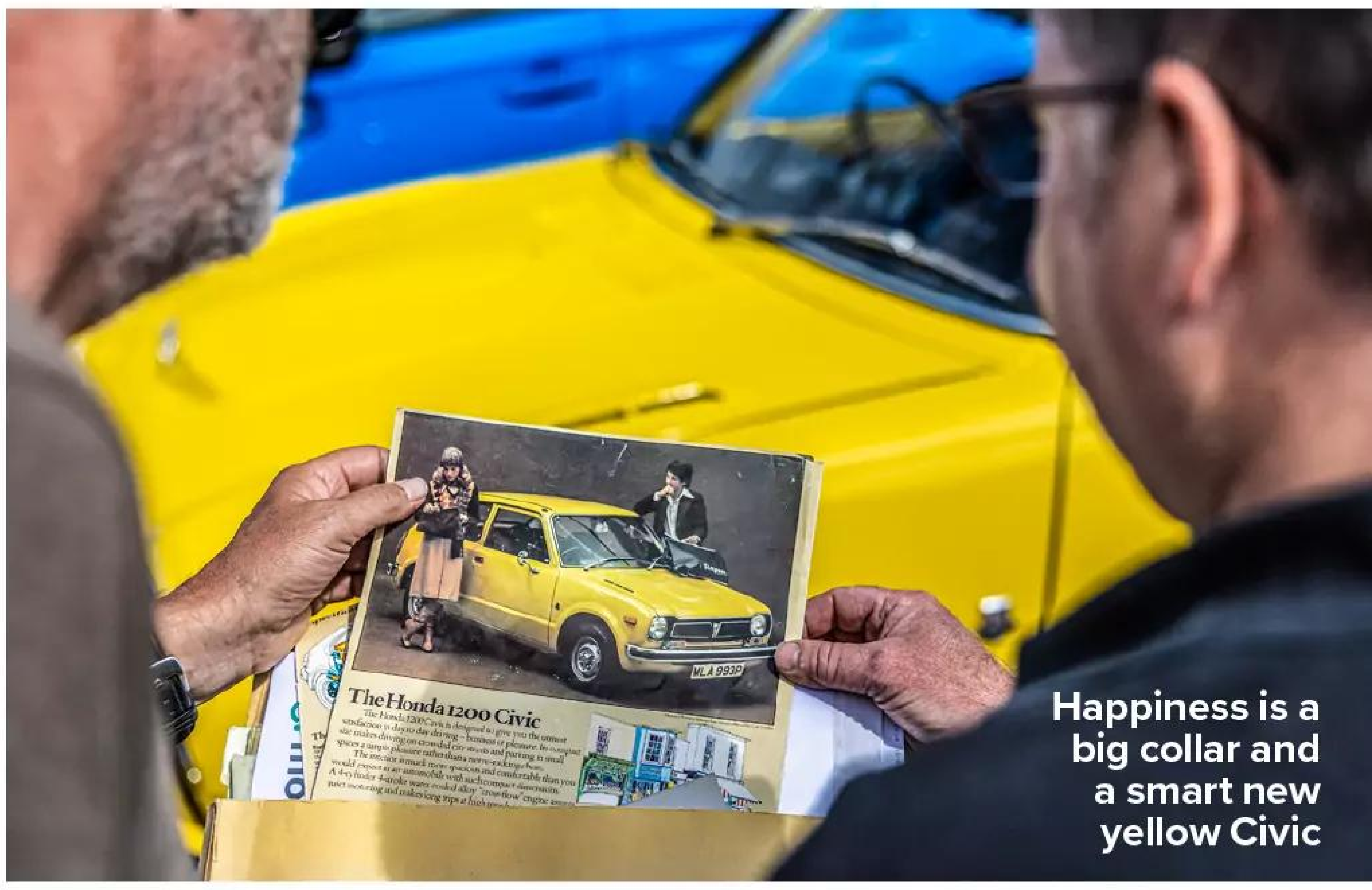
OTHER HONDAS WE'VE LOVED

#5 THE RC166

In 1959 the Honda team arrived on the Isle of Man for the annual TT races. With them they brought four Japanese riders, an American, their own doctor and cook, plus supplies of rice and bean paste.

Two years later, Honda won its first TT race when the legendary Mike Hailwood ripped across the line. In 1964 it produced a 250 with six cylinders to tackle Yamaha's two-stroke machines. The RC166 was an incredible bike that produced 65bhp at 18,000rpm. That's 260bhp per litre. Pre-computers, pre-CAD, the RC166's crankshaft was made from 13 pieces and was so delicate it could be bent by hand. CG

Bluetooth? It could take a while



Happiness is a big collar and a smart new yellow Civic

car

MICHELIN
MICHELIN
SPEEDLINE
SPEEDLINE
Pilot SX
MAGNETI MARELLI
MICHELIN
SISTANCE